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IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS:

OR,

A TREATISE

ON

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

To which is added,

THE MERCY-SEAT: A SERMON.

BY PETER HASLAM.

By the obedience of One, shall many be made righteous.—*Paul*.
We conclude, therefore, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.—*Ibid*.

Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, not by faith only.—*James*.

Abraham believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness.—*Moses*.

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THE EDITOR TO THE READER.



THE manuscript copy of this work was put into my hands by the widow of its author, to read and prepare for the press, it being left in an incorrect state, occasioned by his sudden, unexpected, and much lamented death; by which she is deprived of an affectionate husband, her children of a valuable father, the church of God of an able minister, and mankind of a real friend. His heart was considerably engaged and interested in the subject of these papers, to which he had for some while paid much attention, and he wrote them fully determined to publish his thoughts to the world; and therefore, in giving publicity to them, his intention is complied with, and his purpose faithfully executed. His readers, who either enjoyed his friendship, or sat under his ministry, will easily recognize his *spirit* and *manner* in the following sections. The corrections made have not altered one of his sentiments, and even his phraseology has been particularly guarded. As a posthumous publication, it is strictly and faithfully the work of its author. A few notes are added at the foot of some of the pages, and it is hoped they will not be a disparagement to it.

He frequently lamented the existence of what he judged to be error, and where he thought he perceived its dangerous tendency, and the fatal effects it was likely to produce, he believed it to be his duty to attack it with the weapons of truth, reason, and argument; expose it by mental exertion in its own colours to open view, and, deeming it the enemy both of

God and man, slay it, if possible, with the sword of the Spirit. In all he did in this business, we may fully give him credit, as to the purity of his motives, the sincerity of his intentions, and the benevolence of his wishes. Masked duplicity was as a demon of darkness in his eyes, and pious honesty as an angel of God. He gave ample proof of this in his private intercourse with friends, and in his official interviews with the princes of God's people. This branch of his character is established beyond the reach of successful contradiction. And it is a satisfaction to readers, to peruse the productions of those men, whose hearts were in their literary labour, excited thereto by prudent zeal, melting with tender affection, and breathing good-will towards all men. This stamps a value on their works, that otherwise they would not have, and disposes us to treat what is written with greater attention, and receive it with more cordial respect.

He was not satisfied with a slight perusal of the sacred scriptures, nor contented himself with a superficial knowledge of their important contents; but endeavoured, with all his soul, to enter into them, imbibe their spirit, comprehend their meaning, and fall in with their grand design; and, that he might the more effectually do this, he applied himself to their original languages. Deep investigation was the mark he aimed at, and for which his mind was formed; possessing capacity, energy, and love of truth; evidenced by diligent inquiry, and patient investigation, in his researches. He could not think of dwelling on the surface; but descended himself, and wished others to accompany him:—in conformity to the words of our Saviour, “SEARCH the scriptures,”—John v. 39. The word *ερευνάω* signifies to *search* as men do, who dig in the bowels of the earth for silver and gold; which imports great diligence in seeking, a strong desire and expectation of finding, unwearied

perseverance in the pursuit, and the severest caution not to be mistaken. And his labour was not in vain, as he himself happily experienced, and thousands of living persons now can testify.

His whole aim was usefulness, in conjunction with his own intellectual improvement, and increasing personal godliness. The zeal of God's house eat him up, so much so, that his vigorous efforts, in its service, were greater than his corporeal strength would admit; the consequence was, he frequently suffered in his health. The writer, who knew him from early life, was a witness of this, on the Lord's day fortnight before he had to perform the funeral service over his mortal remains; he preached three sermons, and in delivering the one I had the privilege of hearing, was animated beyond the strength of his decaying frame. The energies of his mind not unfrequently carried him on with a strong flow of expression, and raised him to a great pitch of mental and muscular exertion.

His deep piety generated lively compassion towards his fellow-men, hence the earnest desire he had to do them good, and this led him to adopt the most probable means to answer that purpose, in the prosecution of which he used constant vigilance. In visiting the flock, he was spiritual, instructive, and intent on being useful. Sometimes, in free conversations with his friends, he appeared to be rather positive, but it arose from a persuasion that he was right, and a determination not to give up a particle of what he conceived to be truth, unless stronger reasons could be produced for relinquishing, than he advanced for holding it fast. In his private studies, he was assiduous in his preparations for the pulpit; in his public labours, he preached with a flaming zeal. In addressing the throne of grace, he was copious, expressive, earnest and powerful; in explaining, illustrating, and enforcing the word of God, he was clear, methodical, argumentative, persuasive, alarming, and affection-

ate. And he had the witness of heaven that he had not run before he was sent, for his ministry was not only popular and well attended, but successful, in gaining an accession of souls to the church of Christ; and these, it he hoped, will be his joy and crown at the last day. At his death, his memory was embalmed with the tears of the righteous, and thousands of persons, testifying their esteem and regard, attended the funeral solemnity to the silent grave.

Concerning the character of the work before us, it will speak for itself, and needs not the aid of fulsome panegyric to recommend it. Beside, the public will think, judge, and decide for themselves. The subject is of vast moment, and equally concerns every one. The Editor most devoutly prays, that these papers of his Friend may answer the very laudable wishes, and earnest expectations of their truly excellent author; who now is high in the climes of bliss, reaping the fruit of his happy toil, in the presence of "HIM, who washed him from his sins in his own blood," and whose mediatorial glory he was so ambitious to promote, mixing with shining ranks of angels and saints, speaking forth, in strains of celestial eloquence, the astonishing wonders of redeeming love, or in bursts of rapturous joy, shouting, "Salvation to God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb! Allelujah!"

THOMAS WOOD.

LIVERPOOL,

January 2, 1809.

CONTENTS.



PAGE.

PREFACE 5

SECT. I.

A review of all the passages of holy scripture in which the phrase imputed righteousness occurs 13

SECT. II.

The literal sense of those scriptures which assert the imputation of faith for righteousness, or justification by faith vindicated; against the opinion which supposes them, by a figure of speech, to put a part for the whole, expressing faith only, but intending obedience to the whole law of Christ also 21

SECT. III.

The imputation of faith for righteousness farther vindicated against a second method of interpreting those scriptures which assert it 52

SECT. IV.

The doctrine of justification by faith unfolded, or a statement of the sense in which faith is imputed for righteousness 73

SECT. V.

An examination of the scheme of justification proposed by Dr. MACKNIGHT, which in a singular point of view stands opposed to the doctrine of the last section 87

SECT. VI.

The grand objection to justification by faith, founded on its being injurious to the interests of morality, examined and answered 98

	PAGE.
SECT. VII.	
An examination of several passages of scripture, which seem to stand opposed to the doctrine of faith being imputed for righteousness, by teaching the contrary doctrine of justification by works	115
SECT. VIII.	
Further confirmations of the doctrine of justification by faith, drawn from the sacred writings	131
SECT. IX.	
Reasons why God was pleased to appoint faith, and not works, as the method of a sinner's justification	141
SECT. X.	
Preliminary remarks to an investigation of the popular doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, or active obedience	151
SECT. XI.	
An examination of several passages of scripture; which have been supposed to teach the imputation of Christ's active obedience	155
SECT. XII.	
An inquiry into the immediate dependance which our free justification has upon Christ	175
SECT. XIII.	
Remarks on the importance of propagating, in its purity, the doctrine of imputation as taught in the scriptures	182
SECT. XIV.	
Practical inferences drawn from some of the principal articles in the preceding sections	188
The Mercy-seat: a sermon	192

PREFACE.

THE doctrine of imputed righteousness, how much soever it may be misunderstood by some, and despised by others, has undoubtedly for its foundation divine revelation, and is of the utmost importance to mankind. The inspired writers, in the first period of the Christian era, and the greatest characters and ornaments of the Christian church, in every succeeding period, have employed their pens in a manner which proves that they esteemed it a doctrine of the first magnitude; calculated to bring the highest honour to the grace of God, and containing the most exalted privileges for the perishing race of man. It is, indeed, nothing less than the method which divine mercy has instituted for our justification; who, considered as transgressors of the divine law, are incapable of any other justifying righteousness than that which is merely imputed to us, as such, by the grace of our great Lawgiver and Judge.

On a subject in which every man is so deeply concerned, the necessity of entertaining scriptural views of it, must be obvious. Wholly to disregard it would be

manifest impiety; while our receiving implicitly all that men may have to say concerning it, would be censurable credulity. Instead of either, let us examine it as it stands in the holy scriptures, with due deference to the opinions of men, but with a supreme submission to the decisions of the oracles of God. To plead, that this has been a subject of controversy, will form no substantial apology for neglecting to investigate what God has been pleased to reveal concerning it. Should it not produce a contrary effect? For if the greatest of men, the most pious and the most learned, have seen an importance in it, sufficient to engage their discussions, it must certainly possess sufficient weight to merit our attention.

But some may object, that the subject is too deep for them! this, however, would be an indirect acknowledgment of the claim it has to your most diligent inquiry: for every truth which concerns our salvation, in proportion as it is deep, demands depth of attention, that we may fathom it. Surely it is not unfathomable? For who can imagine, that God would make a revelation of the method of our acceptance with himself, which it is altogether impossible to understand! The subject is, indeed, too deep for the line of mere, unassisted reason.

But how many profound truths are well understood by the aid of divine revelation, which, without it, could not be understood at all: and such, no doubt, is the doctrine before us. By their own light, the wisest men upon earth, may we not say the highest intelligencies in heaven, never could have discovered the method by which infinite Majesty offended, would pardon and admit into favour offending creatures. This was a secret which lay hid in the unfathomable depths of the divine mind; and there, among his other inscrutable counsels, had he not been pleased to reveal it, it must have continued for ever. But he has revealed it, clearly and fully; so that, although it must still be acknowledged to be a sacred mystery, a divine secret it remains no longer.

The phrase, *imputed righteousness*, does not, indeed, occur so frequently in the scriptures as what some others do. But if this may be considered in the least disadvantageous to our inquiries, there are several circumstances which make ample compensation for it. For, first, in every passage where the phrase occurs, (one excepted,*) it is uniformly employed to denote precisely the same thing: and that one exception is of a kind which creates no ambiguity in the

* Psalm cvi. 30, 31.

general use of the phrase; so that it may be considered, in every other passage, as being perfectly unequivocal. Secondly, one whole chapter of the epistle to the Romans is devoted to this single point alone; and in the use, too, of this peculiar phraseology. And, thirdly, the doctrine itself, which is nothing more nor less than justification, or remission of sins through faith, is placed before us, clothed in other language, as frequently, it is presumed, as any other in the whole Christian system. Such is the plenitude of light contained in the sacred writings respecting this profound subject.

But if the doctrine of imputed righteousness is so clearly revealed, what necessity is there for the writings of men respecting it? An inquiry this which has some weight in it, not only as it applies to this particular case, but as it is equally applicable to all human writings on clearly revealed doctrines. It may, however, be replied, that human writings on revealed doctrines are necessary; first, to excite inquiry, to which it is certain, mankind want exciting, and without which, the most clearly revealed truth, cannot be fully understood; secondly, to solve difficulties which may occur in the progress of such inquiries; thirdly, to collect the scattered rays, which are to be

found, on any given subject, in various parts of holy writ, and in different connexions; fourthly, to weaken, and if possible to destroy, the influence of erroneous prepossessions, by meeting and repelling them, in what part soever of the discussion they are likely to advance against the truth; and, lastly, to rescue the truths of God from the shades of error into which they have been dragged by the false teachings of men.—On such an occasion, were there no other reasons, who would not be justifiable in rising on the part of God, and becoming valiant for the truth!

It probably may appear necessary to offer reasons of a more particular kind for publishing the discussions contained in the following sheets, as the subject has repeatedly passed through so much better hands. But on this very account it is difficult, and scarcely consistent with the modesty which becomes the writer, to offer the reasons which produced this publication.

Three systems of imputation are the subjects of the following investigations:—First, the imputation of our own sincere, though imperfect, obedience, for that which is perfect. This, indeed, is not generally spoken of in this particular style; but it is as properly a system of imputation as either of the other two: for it is nothing, in other

words, but the divine acceptance of, or the putting down to our account, sincere, though imperfect, obedience, for or instead of that which is perfect. And this system is taken up in its most refined state; namely, that of justification by evangelical obedience added to faith, through the mediation of Christ. For it is presumed, that if this system of imputation, in its nearest approach to the doctrine of revelation on the subject, can be demonstrated to fall short of this doctrine, all those modes of it which approach not so near the truth, (as that which leaves out the mediation of Christ; and that, again, which supposes us to be justified, not only by works, but by the merit of works,) would necessarily be proved to be more erroneous still. Secondly, the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, his obedience to the precepts of the divine law. Not that it is intimated that this system supposes the imputation of his active obedience separately from his passive, much less exclusively of it. But as the imputation of his passive obedience, or mediatorial sufferings, is not that part of this system which is designed to come under our investigation, his active obedience alone is here mentioned in proposing the subject. Thirdly, the imputation of faith for righteousness, by

an act of divine mercy, through the atonement and intercession of our divine Saviour. These three systems are not, however, brought forward in this particular order; the mode of arrangement adopted, was thought better calculated to place the whole in a clear light; and to lead to that practical issue, which is by far the most important object of controversial discussion.

To make any apologies for the principles which are advanced, would be weakness; or to beg any candour, excepting that which is necessary to a fair investigation of them. But, as it is taken for *granted* in some of the first sections, that the imputation of righteousness, justification, and remission of sins, are expressions which are perfectly synonymous; and, that the faith by which we are justified, implies, not only an assent to the truth, but dispositions suitable to such assent; for this the reader's indulgence is solicited. But if he do not wish to grant it, he is requested to turn to those subsequent sections, where these things, taken for granted, are attempted to be proved. Some indulgence will also be necessary for the frequent repetition of a few phrases; and very likely for many other inelegancies, if not inaccuracies also. —But the most important request yet remains; that the whole may be read with

those devout dispositions which the importance, the divinity of the subject demands; and with which, through divine grace assisting, it is hoped the whole was written. Reader, lift up thy soul to the Father of lights, that his blessed illuminations may so beam upon thee through this medium, as not only to regulate thy views, should they need it, but make thee a happy partaker of that gracious imputation of righteousness, by which alone *man*, being guilty, *can be justified with God.*

SECTION I.

A review of all the passages of holy scripture in which the phrase imputed righteousness occurs.

TWO reasons have led to a review of those scriptures, in which this peculiar phraseology is used, before we enter into a consideration of any others which relate, or are supposed to relate to the same subject. First, that the imputation of righteousness, as stated in them, appears to be the most precise idea of justification, or remission of sins, of any that the book of divine revelation gives. And, secondly, that the greatest mistakes respecting justification, strange as it may appear, have turned on the hinge of the doctrine of imputation. This, however, must have been occasioned by men setting up systems of their own, and then forcing the scripture doctrine of imputation to bend to them, instead of candidly examining what is the divine institution, and then making every other system submit to it. Let us, therefore, examine, if possible, as though we at present knew nothing about what God has been pleased to say to his guilty offspring, respecting that which he will impute unto them for righteousness.

It is scarcely necessary to remark, that, in the following quotations, the several different phrases in our translation, *to reckon, count, account, and*

to impute, denote precisely the same thing, and in the original scriptures are the same word.

Keeping this in view, the first time we meet with the phrase is early in the first of the sacred books;* where the most venerable of all historians relates a fact of the highest importance. Having informed us that God promised a son to Abraham, and that his seed should be like the stars of heaven for multitude, he adds, "And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness." The important fact in this passage, to which we allude, is not Abraham's act, in believing in the Lord, (though this is important, considered as an example of faith,) but the act of God, in imputing faith to him for righteousness; which is vastly more important, considered as shedding forth, in that early period, and under that obscure dispensation, a very luminous beam of light, respecting the method appointed by Jehovah for the restoration of fallen, guilty man, to his unmerited favour.

The next passage in which the imputation of righteousness is mentioned, is in Psalm cvi. 30, 31: "Then stood Phineas, and executed judgment on the Midianitish woman and the transgressing Israelite, and the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him for righteousness, unto all generations for evermore."

Here the phrase is used in a sense which is peculiar to this passage. For in all others, faith is said to be imputed for righteousness; in this, it is a zealous execution of judgment on offenders.—In all others, the imputation of righteousness has a manifest relation to our free justification by the

* Gen. xv. 6.

grace of God; in this it respects either an ecclesiastical reward from God, or a perpetual honour conferred upon him by men.

The latter part of the passage might lead one to conclude, that the imputation here mentioned was not the act of God, but of the people of Israel, who, through all generations, did great honour to the memory of Phineas, as an eminently righteous man, on account of this one act of sacred zeal, in defence of the honour of Jehovah and his holy law. And this sense of the words would find considerable support in the dignified, though extravagantly fanciful, notions of the Jews respecting Phineas. For they affirmed, that he lived till the building of Solomon's temple; that he was Elijah himself, who was taken up into heaven, and who was to come again as the harbinger of the Messiah: * opinions sufficiently absurd; but they serve to show the high honour in which the Jews held him, down to periods very remote from his times.

If, however, we compare the words of the Psalmist with the facts to which they refer, we shall find sufficient reason for understanding this imputation as an act of God, attributing to Phineas this zealous execution of judgment as a memorably righteous action, for which he engaged to reward him, by continuing the high-priesthood in the line of his family, throughout all generations. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phineas the son of Eleazer, the son of Aaron the Priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my

* Jurieu's Critical History, vol. i. page 370.

jealousy. Wherefore say, behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace; and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood.”* This covenant of a perpetual priesthood established with Phineas, appears to have been the particular fact referred to by the Psalmist; but whether it was this act of God, or the perpetual honour which was done to his memory by the people of Israel, it is sufficiently evident that the phrase in question, as here used, is an exception to its general use in the holy scriptures; and that this passage bears no relation to the subject before us, excepting that of mere similarity of expression.

Pass we now to the New Testament. Here we find St. James, in describing the effects of a lively faith, produces the father of the faithful as an example: he particularly directs our attention to that great act of obedience to the command of God in the offering up of Isaac his son. “Seest thou,” thou licentious professor of Christian faith, “how faith wrought with his works, and by works his faith was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.”† That is to say, this scripture was manifestly proved to be a just testimony; because this act of obedience manifestly proved him to possess justifying faith, the faith which God imputeth for righteousness.

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, to convince the judaizing Christians among them, that justification is not attainable by the works of the law, moral or ceremonial, but by faith, appeals to the same fact, “Even,” says he, “as Abraham be-

* Numb. xxv. 10—13.

† James ii. 22, 23.

believed in God, and that was counted unto him for righteousness.”*

But the part of holy scripture on which the principal weight of this subject resteth, is the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Romans; which, taken in connexion with the three preceding ones, may be regarded as a clear and decisive account of that which God imputeth for righteousness, that by which he justifieth the ungodly. Having in the three first chapters proved, that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God, but that we may be justified by faith through the propitiation which God has set forth for this purpose, he proceeds, in the fourth chapter, to crown all his other arguments by a logical and striking train of reasoning. He attacks the prejudices of the Jews with a weapon which they could neither evade nor resist. He produces an argument out of their own universally acknowledged scriptures, written by their great legislator, respecting the justification of their august patriarch, even before the Mosaic law, or circumcision itself was ordained. “What shall we say then, that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.”—An elliptical clause, plainly meaning, “but he hath not whereof to glory before God,” because he was not justified by works. “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.†” The ceremonial law was not yet given; but had he perfectly obeyed the moral law, he would doubtless have been justified by works, not by faith.

* Gal. iii. 6.

† Rom. iv. 1, 2, 3.

by a legal righteousness performed, not by an evangelical righteousness imputed. But this great progenitor of believers was not justified by works, but by faith, not by a legal righteousness, but an imputed one. And in the same manner, also, our apostle proceeds to show, are all they justified who tread in the steps of his faith; God's method of justifying a guilty child of Adam continuing invariably the same, from the original apostasy down to the latest generations. "Now to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt;"* so it is between man and man; he that performs the labour, for which he receives stipulated wages, receives not those wages as a gratuity, but as a debt due to him for his work; and so it would be also between God and man, had man performed perfect obedience to the divine law; justification would not then have been an act of grace, but a debt meritoriously due. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin;"† past sin, namely, that which is no longer imputed, because freely forgiven.

The Jews insisted on circumcision and the keeping of the whole law of Moses, as being absolutely necessary to justification; and judaizing Christians, not yet completely free from this error, urged upon their gentile brethren, that they must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, or they could not be

* Rom. iv. 4.

† Rom. iv. 5, 6, 7, 8.

saved. This our apostle now proceeds to refute, in a manner that was sufficient either to convince or confound every judaizing Christian and unbelieving Jew. For having quoted the testimony of David, respecting the blessedness of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness without works, he asks, "Cometh this blessedness on the circumcision only? or on the uncircumcision also?"* Had a Jew or a judaizing Christian answered, "It cometh not on the uncircumcision, but on the circumcision only," our apostle would immediately have refuted the erroneous reply with the case of Abraham: "For we say," adds the apostle, "that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received," long after this, "the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness which he had, being yet uncircumcised, that he might," according to the promise made to him, "be the Father of all them that believe, though," like him, when that promise was made to him, "they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed to them also."† The apostle proceeds with this argument, in the course of which, having commended the strength of Abraham's faith; he adds, "And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for ours also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on him, who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead."‡

Such is the use which the holy Spirit has made of this phraseology, respecting the justification of

* Rom. iv. 9. † Rom. iv. 9, 10, 11. ‡ Rom. iv. 22, 23, 24.

man; and the above are all the passages in which it is inserted. And what difficulties soever may attach to the doctrine of imputation in other respects, surely there can be none in discovering, what it is that God is here said to impute for righteousness. If we are as open to conviction as mankind generally profess to be, if we possess a noble readiness of mind to embrace whatsoever God by his holy oracles teaches us, if we are willing to stop our ear for a moment against the clamour of pre-conceived opinions, that we may attentively listen to the voice of truth in the preceding quotations, will not the effect be a clear discovery, a full conviction, that it is faith God imputeth for righteousness in justification, and it is in this sense we are justified, or have remission of sins by faith. If this conviction does not strike us with a degree of force which is almost irresistible, let us once more cast our eyes on the above scriptures; and while we review them, may the darkness of unbelief, and the mists of erroneous prepossessions, vanish before the beams of divine truth. If, on a subject of such high importance, we have already erred, either wholly or in part, why should we continue to err? On every subject we ought to be solicitous to learn what the great God has condescended to teach; but most of all on this, in which, a little reflection will convince us, we are more deeply interested than in any other. Let us therefore throw open our bosom to admit the luminous rays of holy light, which, proceeding from the divine word, seek to pour themselves into our expanding mind. Like humble disciples, let us sit at the feet of our unerring teacher, thankfully receiving

The sacred lessons of his grace,
Transmitted through his word,

respecting the method which he who is most holy, hath ordained for the justification of sinful man.

Into this grand doctrine we might now have entered immediately, by proceeding to unfold the nature of that imputation of faith for righteousness which is asserted in the scriptures and reviewed in this section, had not two opposite methods of interpreting these scriptures interrupted us; methods of interpretation, either of which, if admitted, would utterly subvert the doctrine of faith. It will therefore be necessary to direct our attention to each of them, that we may establish, in opposition to both, the important fact which is so unequivocally affirmed by the holy Spirit, that it is faith only by which God justifies a sinner, through the blood and intercession of Christ our Lord; and, that he does this by imputing faith to him for righteousness. This will necessarily occupy the two following sections.

SECTION II.

The literal sense of those scriptures which assert the imputation of faith for righteousness, or justification by faith, vindicated; against the opinion which supposes them, by a figure of speech, to put a part for the whole, expressing faith only, but intending obedience to the whole law of Christ also.

AMONG the writers that have insisted on a life of obedience being added to faith, in order to justification from past offences, and who have therefore supposed the term faith, in the apostolic sense, to include such obedience, no one has expressed

his thoughts more freely than Monsieur Le Clerc. "After the apostles," says our learned author, "had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and expounded the Christian doctrine more at large, the notion of *faith* included in it a persuasion, not only of the truth of *Christ's* mission, but also of his *apostles* and *disciples*, whose doctrine *God* gave a testimony to by innumerable wonders; and an assent accordingly yielded to whatever they asserted, joined with a life suitable to such a persuasion. And this notion" (that is, the notion of a life suitable to faith, joined with faith) "the word *πίστις*" (faith) "has in the epistles to the *Romans* and *Galatians*, where St. Paul disputes about justification. For in these places *πίστις*" (faith) "that is," adds our author, "a living according to the Christian institution, setting aside the works commanded by the law of *Moses* only, is said to justify."

Now if the term faith, as used by St. Paul in his dispute about justification, does indeed include a life which is suitable to such faith, it will certainly follow that the doctrine of justification by faith alone can be supported no longer. But that the term does not include such a life of obedience, but is to be understood according to its literal, and its only proper sense, is what may be proved by numerous arguments; and, therefore, it is not by faith, and a life of future obedience joined to it, that we are said to be justified, but by faith only.

Before we proceed, however, let it be clearly understood what it is to which we object. For, first, we object not to the necessity of adding to faith a life of obedience; for though the scriptures plainly exclude the necessity of it, in order to remission of past sins, yet they certainly insist upon it in order

to our continuance in the grace of God, and to those final rewards which are promised to works of faith. Neither, secondly, do we object to the necessity of suitable dispositions accompanying faith. On the contrary, it is most certain, that unless an abhorrence of sin, a deep humiliation on account of it, a fixed purpose of soul against it, and a desire and resolution to walk in all the ways of God, accompany faith, it is not that faith which is of the operation of God, nor will he impute it for righteousness to any man, how orthodox soever he may be. The question before us, therefore is this; whether a man is justified, by an act of divine grace, whensoever he truly believeth, in the sight of him who requireth truth in the inward parts; or whether, before he can be justified, he must add to such faith a life of future obedience. And what we affirm, is, that a man is justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Jesus, in the very moment that he thus believeth with the heart unto righteousness. And what we deny, is, that a life of Christian obedience must be added to such faith, before it will justify; before God will impute it for righteousness: and the refutation of this, while it establishes the doctrine of justification by faith alone, will also serve to show, that though this mode of justification by works, is by far the most refined, and comes much nearer the truth than others, which set up works alone, or which exclude the mediation of Christ, is yet very far from the doctrine of divine revelation on this momentous subject.

We advance against it, therefore, in the first place, that it sets up a method of justification, the terms of which are necessarily indeterminate, indefinable, and uncertain. Indeterminate; because it does not fix the length of time that such obedience

must be added to faith before justification is to be granted; nor the degree of perfection in such obedience that will be requisite. Indefinable; because that which is indeterminate is necessarily incapable of being defined. Who can define the precise terms of a sinner's acceptance with God, if it be admitted, that the faith by which he is to be justified, includes in it a life of future obedience, the length of which life, and the perfection of which obedience, are perfectly undetermined? Uncertain; because that act or series of acts which may be proposed in order to some given end, can afford no idea of certainty in relation to that end, but in proportion as the nature and the quantity thereof are defined. What idea of certainty can any man have in relation to his justification, if he admit, that in order to it, he must add to faith a life of obedience, the nature of which obedience, as it respects its perfection, and the quantity of it, as it respects length of time, are perfectly undefined. And can it be imagined that a method of justification, so indeterminate, so indefinable, so utterly uncertain, is the wise and gracious method which is of divine appointment?

Secondly, it stands directly opposed to the letter of all the very numerous passages of scripture in which remission of sins, imputation of righteousness, and justification are said to be by faith. For, among all these, there is not one which affirms, or even intimates, that remission of past sins is suspended on future obedience joined to present faith. The passage in St. James, respecting Abraham's justification by works, we shall find, in some subsequent section, to be a strong proof that his justification in the sense under consideration, was not suspended on those works, but was, long before the instance produced by the apostle, granted to his

faith only. Now although it is very agreeable to the idiom of the holy scriptures to put a part for the whole; yet, that *all* the scriptures, on a subject of the highest importance, a subject so necessary to be clearly understood, should do this; that they should always use a figure of speech, and by a term too which was never so used in other writings, that the letter of not one single passage should express the whole, can never be reconciled to any rule of good writing or good sense; much less to the wisdom of divine inspiration.

But, thirdly, as it is affirmed that the word (πίστις) faith, is used by St. Paul in his dispute about justification, to denote, not only faith itself, but obedience also, as some very considerable writers have joined with the above quoted author, in affirming the same thing, and as others, who are far from allowing the word this extent of meaning when used with respect to justification, yet allow it when used in some other cases, it will be necessary to investigate this point thoroughly: much depends upon it, as the judicious reader will easily perceive.

Monsieur Le Clerc says the word frequently occurs in this sense in the epistle to the Hebrews; the eleventh chapter, and elsewhere. Surely this was said without due consideration; a man of profound learning and critical sagacity, could not, it is presumed, have ventured on such an assertion, had he first examined the grounds of it. Is this the meaning of the term (πίστις) the first time it is used in this epistle? "The word preached," or proclaimed, "did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."* The word

* Heb. iv. 2,

which was preached or proclaimed to the Israelites, was the good report of Caleb and Joshua respecting the promised land, together with the assurance Moses gave them, that God would fight for them and bring them into it. But this word did not profit them: it did not profit by exciting them to go up and possess the land as they were directed; nor, consequently, by leading them into the actual possession of it. And the reason why it did not thus profit them, was, its not being mixed with faith in them that heard it,—they did not believe it. “In this thing,” says Moses, “ye did not believe the Lord your God;”* a certain proof, that in this place of the epistle to the Hebrews, faith does not denote obedience also, but believing only. And to this agrees the note of our author. “The words of the promise concerning a quiet habitation, did not profit those who heard it only without believing it.” Neither can any thing more be made of “repentance from dead works, and (πισεως επι Θεου) of faith towards God,”† in the second passage where the word occurs: nor of (πληροφορια πισεως) “the full assurance of faith,”‡ with which we are to draw near to God through our great Highpriest. But perhaps our author had his eye upon the two last verses of the tenth chapter: “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul.”|| But the next verse defines this faith as being “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;” a definition

* Deut. i. 29—32.

† Heb. x. 22.

† Heb. vi. 1.

|| Heb. x. 38, 39.

which proves, that the term, as here used, denotes faith only; for obedience is no part of the substance of things hoped for, or of the evidence of things not seen. The apostle, therefore, intended only to show, that faith, with respect to the "things hoped for," the "things not seen," would enable a man to persevere in the way of life; in opposition to the drawing back here mentioned, which is consequent upon the failure of such faith. In conformity to this, the latter part of the passage literally is, "we are of them that believe to the preserving of the soul." And who can find this double notion of the word in that faith of which Jesus is "the author and finisher;"* a clause which was designed to encourage the persecuted Christians of those times, to the exercise of that vigorous faith, which is celebrated in the verses preceding as accomplishing such wonders, in former times. Neither can any argument be justly founded on the last passage in this epistle, where this word is used; in which we are exhorted to imitate the faith of those who have had the rule over us, and have spoken unto us the word of God; to which imitation of their faith we are encouraged by a consideration of (τὴν ἐκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς) "the issue of their conversation;" and of the immutability of him, who is the powerful, gracious, and faithful object of *our* faith, as well as of theirs, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."† But, as our learned author makes particular mention of the eleventh chapter of this epistle, let us carefully examine, whether the word under consideration, denotes both faith and obedience in the several passages in which it is there used, or in any of them.

* Heb. xii. 2.

† Heb. xiii. 7, 8.

That the word cannot have this signification as used in the first verse, where the apostle defines the faith of which he treats in this chapter, is what we have seen already: for although it is a definition which agrees admirably to faith itself, which has respect to the recompence of reward, yet to obedience it does not agree at all. And this, considering that the apostle throughout the chapter elucidates his definition by examples, is a strong presumption, that we shall not find it once used in the sense our author affirms. Is it through faith and obedience that "we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God?" Surely it is through faith *only*? And what was the faith by which Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain; but his respect to the promised seed, leading him to present, no doubt, according to divine appointment, not a meat offering only, the fruit of the ground, but a sin offering also, of the firstlings of his flock. And what was it, but faith alone, by which "Enoch was translated, that he might not see death?" For the faith which he possessed is described in the verse following, as a believing in the existence of God, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. And was it not merely by faith, that "Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, was so moved with fear as to prepare an ark to the saving of his house, by which he condemned the world for its unbelief of the divine threatening, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." And should we admit this sense of the word when it is said, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed," the most absurd tautology would be the consequence; for it would be,

"By faith and obedience he obeyed." And how little would it fall short of absurdity to say, "By faith" and obedience "he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country;" his sojourning by faith is a natural thought enough, but his sojourning by obedience has not the least claim to nature or propriety. And what was the faith of Sarah, by which "she received strength to conceive seed?" Was it faith and obedience? What obedience? No, it was "her judging him faithful who had promised." And what was the faith in which "these all died?" The apostle informs us; it was their "seeing the promises afar off," their being "persuaded of them, and embracing them." And that the faith by which "Abraham offered up Isaac," did not consist in both faith and obedience, is evident from the account St. James gives of the affair; for he strongly distinguishes between Abraham's faith and the obedience which it produced; he teaches us, that his obedience proceeded from his faith, and that by it his faith was made perfect; things which could not be said, if the term faith, as used by the apostle, included his obedience. And St. Paul informs us, that the faith by which Abraham offered up Isaac, consisted in his "Accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." It is easy for every one to see how such a faith as this would produce such a high example of obedience; but how this obedience itself could be denoted by his thus "accounting" of the power of God, it is presumed, is what no one can see. And was it not by faith "only," that "Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come?" Inspired by God respecting events which would happen to them and their posterity, he so fully believed that God

would bring about these events, that he pronounced them as his blessing on each of his sons, a little before his decease. And was it by faith and obedience, or only by faith, that "Jacob, when he was dying blessed both the sons of Joseph?" Or that "Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones?" To ascribe such acts of dying men to faith, is rational enough; but to ascribe them to it in the double notion contended for, would be altogether irrational: for what had obedience to do with foretelling what would happen to the sons of Joseph, and to the children of Israel? And the same remark applies to the act of the parents of Moses, who "by faith hid him three months, not fearing the king's commandment." And with respect to the faith of Moses himself, by which "he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," it consisted in his having, "respect to the recompence of reward? for this is the argument by which our apostle proves that he did these things by faith. And the faith by which "he left Egypt," when he brought out the children of Israel, "not fearing the wrath of the king," was that confidence in God, who had sent him to them for this purpose, which stands opposed to fearing the fury of Pharaoh. And what was the faith by which "he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them," but a confidence in the divine appointment of that rite, for the preservation of the first-born in every house on which the blood

was found. For God had said, "when I see the blood I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy;" and Moses kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood, firmly believing this; and thus he did it by faith. Understood exactly in the same sense, it was "by faith that they passed through the Red Sea;" for when they beheld the great deep standing like a wall on each side, to enter into the midst of it, would, no doubt, require some confidence in God; but he had promised, that they should "go on dry ground through the midst of the sea," and they believed the promise, and thus by faith they passed through. Thus also, it was "by faith that the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days;" for it was in itself an impossible thing, that their going round the city for seven days, blowing trumpets, and giving a loud shout, should be immediately followed by an event so strange, as the high, strong walls of a city falling down flat without ever being touched by them; but as God had promised it, they believed the promise, and the thing was accomplished. The faith by which "Rahab the harlot perished not," was her believing in the true God; "for the Lord your God," said she to the spies, "he is God in heaven above and in earth beneath." And a mere glance at the many examples with which the apostle concludes, is sufficient to convince us, that faith alone is intended; for what else can be meant, when we are informed, that "by faith they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness," &c. To say nothing of the other articles here mentioned, how strange would it sound to say, they "wrought righteousness" by faith and obedience; for this, so far as obedience

is supposed to be included in the term, would manifestly be, to work righteousness by righteousness itself. And now we come to the last place in this chapter, in which the word is used; where the apostle remarks, that all these persons “obtained a good report (μαρτυρηθέντες δια, were borne testimony unto) through faith.” Now it is obvious, that the word in this passage must be understood as it is in all the preceding ones, on account of the relation in which the passage itself stands to them. And, indeed, it is certain, that several of these persons never were borne witness unto by the inspired writers, in regard to a life of piety and obedience joined to their faith; but are celebrated *merely* on account of their great achievements through faith in the true God. And now the judicious reader may judge for himself, whether in this chapter, or elsewhere in this epistle, the word (πίστις) denotes any thing more than mere faith, literally and properly understood.

Other scriptures, however, have been quoted in favour of this opinion; but the bare reading of them is sufficient to lead to a suspicion that it is found no easy thing to obtain any support for it from the holy scriptures. They refer us to 2 Tim. iv. 7, “I have kept the faith,” “where keeping the faith,” says Dr. Hammond, “must needs be constancy and fidelity.” Doubtless; but this constancy and fidelity are not denoted by the term “faith,” but by the clause, “I have kept:” sure it was not his “faith,” that was his fidelity and constancy, but his “keeping” the faith. And what has 1 Pet. i. 7, to do with this? the faith there mentioned is that which in the verse following stands opposed to seeing; a certain proof that it does not denote any thing but mere believing. Phil. i. 29, is

another instance which is produced by the Doctor, "Unto you it is given on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." To suffer for the sake of Christ does certainly imply constancy and fidelity to him, but to believe on him is so far from implying the same thing, that the text itself demonstrates the contrary; for it expresses, not only a plain *distinction* between their believing on Christ, and their suffering for his sake, but an *essential difference* with respect to the expressions, "obedience of faith," and "righteousness of faith," they very ill serve the cause for which they are produced; as the one makes an evident distinction between faith and obedience, and the other, understood of practical righteousness, would do just the same. It would be quite as accurate to say, the fruit of a tree is the tree itself, as that the obedience of faith is the faith itself; or, in other words, we might as well affirm, that the tree is the fruit of the tree, as that faith is the obedience of faith. Archbishop Tillotson, who quotes the above expression, adds several others, which, he says, make it evident that obedience to all the precepts and commands of the gospel is included in the notion of the word faith. This specimen of evidence, however, will not encourage us to admit the assertion without examination; nor will those which follow: "they have not all obeyed the gospel for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?"* "But if faith," says our divine, "doth not include obedience, how could the apostle prove, that there were some that did not obey the gospel, because Isaiah said there were some that did not believe it?" To this it will be sufficient to reply, that

* Rom. x. 16.

although the belief of the gospel does not include obedience to it, yet obedience to the gospel necessarily supposes the belief of it. The apostle therefore very properly proves, that there were some who did not obey the gospel, by quoting the prophetic testimony of Isaiah, that there were some that did not even believe it. The argument which is founded on a comparison of Heb. iii. 12. with Heb. iv. 11. is not quite fair; as it may impose on the judgment of the mere English reader. It is true, indeed, that when the apostle exhorts the Hebrews in the latter passage to “labour to enter *into* the rest which remaineth to the people of God,” lest any of them should fall like the ancient Israelites by “unbelief,” he repeats the same thing in substance, as is contained in the former passage, where he exhorts them to “take *heed* lest there be in any of them an evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God.” It is true also, that in the latter, he varies the phrase, instead of ἀπιστία, *APISTIA*, (unbelief) he uses ἀπειθεῖα, *APEITHEIA*, which, says our divine, signifies *disobedience*; from which he concludes, that unbelief in the one passage; and disobedience in the other, signify the same thing; and therefore that faith and obedience also are equivalent terms. The fact, however, is, that the two words used by the apostle in these passages do both signify *unbelief*; and though ἀπειθεῖα, *APEITHEIA*, is a few times translated *disobedience*, yet it properly and strictly signifies *unbelief*. So it is rendered in four of the passages where it occurs: and in the other three,* where we have the phrase, “children of disobedience,” it would make quite as good a sense if rendered, “children of unbelief;”

* Eph. ii. 2. v. 6. Col. ii. 6.

especially if the apostle had in view the words of God respecting the unbelieving Israelites, "children in whom there is no faith;"* for what are children in whom there is no faith, but according to the expressive phrase of the apostle, "children of unbelief."†

The argument drawn from John iii. 36, falls together with this. For the words are very properly rendered in our translation; they ought not to be translated, "he that" obeyeth "not the son," but as they are, "he that believeth not;" that is, he that obstinately persisteth in not believing, for so the word means; and this is a very sufficient reason for its being used instead of ἀπιστεύω, *APISTEO*, which signifies simply, not to believe.

In one passage, ‡ however, the word (πιστις) denotes fidelity to engagements, and in another || it is thought to denote fidelity to a trust; but in the first it is used with respect to God's fidelity to his word; and in the second, a servant's fidelity to his master: in neither of them therefore does it signify faith and obedience. If, indeed, any instances could be produced, in which the word ought to be understood with this latitude, yet would it not follow, that it ought to be so understood when used with respect to justification. But as though the holy Spirit fore-

* Deut. xxxii. 20.

† It does not appear that ἀπειθεῖα is ever once used to denote disobedience; *only* as this may consist in an obstinate refusal to yield assent to what God reveals. "Tam diffidentia, quam contumacia," says the learned Leigh; that is, "stubbornness as well as unbelief." And Estius, as quoted by him, says, "Απειθεῖα signif. pertinaciam non credendi; etiam visis et auditis idoneis documentis, q. d. impersuasibilitatem." Leigh's crit. sacra on the word.

‡ Rom. iii. 3.

|| Titus ii. 10.

saw the use which would be made of it, against our free justification by faith, he has not put this weapon into our hands? no, not by one single instance. Let it be judged, then, by every one who wishes not to yield implicit credit to the assertions of men, how learned soever, how little is due to the assertion, that when we are said to be justified by faith, the meaning is, that we are justified by faith and obedience.

Proceed we to a fourth argument against this mode of interpreting the scriptures, on the subject of justification by faith; that it is inconsistent with the whole scope of the apostle's reasoning in his epistle to the Romans, and with the objections which he supposes to be made against his doctrine. His reasoning is evidently not designed to prove that justification is by "faith" and "works," in opposition to works *only*; but that it is by "faith," in opposition to works at all. And several of our learned commentators think, the apostle's phrase of justification "without the works of the law," ought to be rendered, "without the works of law;" that is, of any law whatever. And had our apostle meant to prove, that justification is by faith and obedience, what reason could he have had to suppose that his doctrine would be likely to have the objections raised against it, which he anticipates and answers? He supposes it to be objected, that his method of justification maketh void the law through faith; that it encourages people to sin, that grace may abound; that it forms a security against the penalties due to sin, by teaching, that believers are not under the law, but under grace. Objections these which might naturally enough be supposed to arise against

justification by faith alone, but which could never be imagined to arise against justification by faith and obedience.

Fifthly, when the fairest and most pressing occasions offer themselves to the apostle for stating his doctrine with literal exactness, he never proceeds to inform us that he includes obedience in his notion of faith. In all those passages where he asserts justification by faith, without works, had he included Christian works in his notion of faith, we might reasonably have expected him to inform us of it. But in the passages where he answers objections to his doctrine of faith, as though it were a licentious doctrine, the occasion would have been so pressing, that an explanation of this kind would have been unavoidable: more especially, as this is a sense of the word ($\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$) which the Greek writers had never yet attached to it. But instead of this, he answers these objections on quite another principle, and, that he intended obedience to be understood in his use of the term faith, he never gives us the smallest intimation.

Sixthly, in the instance of justification by faith, fixed upon by the apostle, it is demonstrable, that no works at all are to be understood. For Abraham's believing, which was imputed to him for righteousness, was a mere act of faith in the promise of God, without any work whatever being joined with it. God promised, and Abraham believed the promise, and his believing was counted to him for righteousness.

Seventhly, justification by faith, understood as including obedience to the law of Christ, is impossible. To suppose a sinner who is not yet reconciled to God, not yet possessed of the spirit of his love, capable of performing a justifying obedience

to a law which is more pure, more spiritual, more extensive than even the law of Moses itself, would be absurd in the extreme: and to say, imperfect obedience will answer the end, would only be to exchange absurdity for impiety; as it would open wide the door for an imperfection of Christian obedience which is wholly antichristian. If we must be justified at all by obedience to the commands and precepts of the gospel, surely this method cannot allow any failure of such obedience. How then can a sinner who daily feels there is scarcely any thing besides failure, a sinner who is groaning under the tyranny of sin, "O wretched man, that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death," hope for justification by such a method? And how can we imagine, that God would propose such a method to him! A method by which, we again pronounce the justification of a sinner a real impossibility.

Eighthly, this method of justification, would necessarily suppose, that a man may be a sincere, a true believer, in the sight of God, and yet remain unjustified, unabsolved from his sins, and consequently under the curse of eternal death, from which we are never saved till our sins which have merited it are forgiven. And is this consistent with the uniform doctrine of the gospel, with respect to such characters? "He that believeth is not condemned," saith our Lord; and again, "He that believeth, though he were dead," dead in sins, and condemned to the second death for sins, "yet shall he live. All that believe," says St. Paul, "are justified; whosoever believeth shall receive remission of sins," saith St. Peter. And these are only a specimen of the whole testimony of the gospel respecting every one that believeth. Shall we then

affirm, that a man who this hour becomes a true believer is not yet justified, is still condemned for past sins, and liable to eternal death, because he has not yet added to his faith a life of obedience? or can we receive, as the doctrine of God, an opinion which necessarily supposes such things?

This naturally suggesteth a ninth argument against it; it is contrary to numerous plain facts, which are recorded in the holy scriptures, and especially in that invaluable history of the first Christian believers, the acts of the apostles.

When the jailor at Philippi fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, and inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" they replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."* Now when we are informed, that he immediately believed and was baptized, can we imagine that his believing did not answer the end proposed by these servants of the living God, that he still continued an unjustified man, a sinner unsaved from past sins and future wrath? Or can it be thought that the reply of Paul and Silas would convey to the mind of an inhabitant of Philippi, a Grecian city, any other idea than that which the Greeks had always attached to the word, (πιστευον) "believe thou?" There can be no reasonable doubt, but that the deeply awakened soul of the Philippian, upon his being immediately baptized as a believer, would immediately exult in the salvation of Christ: like the eunuch, who on his believing was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing.† And what else can be thought respecting those gentiles who were assembled in the house of Cornelius,‡ when under the first declaration of the gospel

* Acts xvi. 29, 30, 31. † Acts viii. 37—40. ‡ Acts x. 34—48.

that ever was made to the gentiles, "The Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word?" And it is worthy of notice, that as the sacred historian informs us, the Spirit fell on them, while the apostle was in the very act of proclaiming remission of sins through the name of Christ to all that should believe on him. Would the Spirit of God have sealed this doctrine in a manner so extraordinary, had it not been eminently the doctrine of God? Or would this divine baptism have accompanied it into the hearts of these gentile converts, in the very moment they heard the word and believed it, had not God then freely pardoned all their past iniquities, and taken them into favour with himself? Can it be imagined that although they believed, were baptized with the Holy Ghost, and admitted into the church of God by the baptism of water, that they were still unjustified in the sight of God, and still under condemnation for their former iniquities! The three thousand also,* who were pricked in their hearts under the sermon of the same apostle, which he preached on the day of Pentecost,—and inquired, "What must we do?"—who gladly received the word, and were immediately baptized for the remission of sins, were their sins *not* then remitted? And what life of obedience had they joined to their faith, seeing the piercings of heart they felt for having crucified the Messiah, their thankful reception of the offer of pardon, and their being baptized for the remission of sins, all took place in a few hours; and, with respect to those who were first baptized, probably, in a few minutes. Facts of the same kind abound in the historic books of the New Testament; facts which

*Acts ii. 37—42.

demonstrate that justification is not suspended on that obedience which is subsequent to faith, but is granted, by an immediate act of divine grace, to faith itself.

Once more, the most learned divines, ancient and modern, with a few exceptions, support the literal sense of the term faith in the passages contained in the last section, and in all others on the subject of justification.

To quote all the authorities of this kind, would itself be sufficient for a volume. It shall suffice, therefore, to select a few from those writers who are well known not to be the most strenuous advocates for faith, but are even accused of leaning too much to works.

The testimony of this class of writers, in favour of justification by faith alone, cannot fail to have considerable weight with those who are conversant with their very practical way of writing, and their vigorous opposition to the *licentious* doctrine of faith, which was too prevalent in their times. The antinomianism which infested the reformation soon after its commencement, and which afterward made dreadful havock with practical Christianity, led many very considerable writers into a method of discussing the doctrines of the gospel, which, in its general strain, runs so far into the opposite extreme, that it is only by a careful inspection of their works that their precise notions of justification by faith can be discovered. It is evident, indeed, that this doctrine was not itself so much the object of their discussions, as to guard against antinomian abuses of it. And a careless way of reading their works, may easily lead to conclusions, respecting their precise views on this important subject, which a more minute investigation will

not allow us to draw. It is manifest, that the fear of aiding the dangerous Solifidianism of their times, led them to express themselves with such practical qualifications as very much obscure their real views, as more exactly stated in some parts of their writings. This, it is presumed, was not the best method. Among some it has procured ill names; such as Legalists, Pharisees, Merit-mongers. Among others, who have read their works without sufficiently considering their design, the effects have been still worse; their readers have actually become what they were only charged with. It will be found, however, that even this class of divines, in these latter ages of Christianity, have borne as clear a testimony to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as St. Clement himself did in the first age. A clearer testimony than his, indeed, cannot be borne. Speaking of the posterity of Abraham, he says, "They were all greatly honoured, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they themselves wrought, but through his will. And we also," adds the venerable saint, "being called by the same will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, neither by our own wisdom, or knowledge, or piety, or the works which we have done in the holiness of our hearts; but by that faith by which God Almighty has justified all men from the beginning."*

Dr. Hammond is one of those divines who perpetually joins obedience to faith, in such-a way

* This passage, which is remarkably clear and strong, is taken from the first epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians, a piece of Christian antiquity which the critics themselves allow to be genuine.

as would naturally lead his readers to conclude, that justification by faith alone forms no part of his creed. Yet even he, when expressing his thoughts more exactly, gives a clear testimony to this doctrine: "This I conceive," (says the Doctor, speaking of his definition of the faith which justifies) "is the *faith*, which in St. James, must, when opportunity serves, be *showed or demonstrated by works*, (James iii. 18,) and if in that case it do not, is a *dead faith*, (v. 20.) But supposing it sincere, though not yet tried, then it is that which I now speak of, and is then opposed to works, not as those note, first, the ceremonies of the Mosaical law; or secondly, perfect, unsinning obedience, but as they signify actual performance." To this," adds our learned commentator, "there is a place of a venerable ancient writer, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, which is very applicable, who having said of the thief on the cross, 'he was willing to do well, but death prevented him,' answers him presently in the person of Christ, 'the work is not the only thing I expect,' (or which I 'so require,' that nothing else will serve the turn) 'but I have accepted thy faith.' " *

This passage is peculiarly valuable on several accounts: first, because it proves, that when the Doctor joins obedience to faith with respect to justification, he either means by justification, its continuance, (in the sense St. James uses the term,) as well as its first commencement; or, that by obedience, he intends only a virtual obedience, a firm purpose of mind to obey. Secondly, because the passage denies, not only the necessity of per-

* Note on Matt. viii. 10.

fect obedience in order to justification, but of any actual performances whatsoever. Thirdly, because it contains an important testimony to the same effect from a very considerable Christian writer of the fourth century.

A second authority which may be produced on this subject, is that of the learned Dr. Cudworth. After an able refutation of an error which he justly thought injurious to practical Christianity, he qualifies his reasoning with the following words: "It is not our intention to quarrel about words and phrases, as if Christ's meritorious satisfaction might not be said to be imputed to those that repent and believe the gospel for remission of sins, much less to deny, what the holy scripture plainly asserts, true and living faith, that worketh by love, which is the very essence of the new creature, or regenerate nature, λογίζεσθαι εἰς δικαιοσύνην, to be imputed or accounted for righteousness under the gospel dispensation."*

Mr. Chillingworth, one of the greatest reasoners this country ever could boast, is another of this class of writers, who asserts, though very cautiously, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. "Is there," says he, "any remission of sins without faith? Shall we not only exclude works from justification, but faith also? God forbid, for so we should not only contradict the grounds of God's holy word, but also raze and destroy the very foundations of the second covenant."† Again, "one chief end of Christ's resurrection in respect of us, was to work in us a lively faith, whereby we might be justified, and acquitted from our

* Sermon on 1 Cor. xv. 57.

† Sermon on Rom. viii. 34.

sins.”* Once more, “without question there is nothing can be more evident to a man that shall impartially consider St. Paul’s method in his discourse of justification, than that by faith he intends some operative, working grace in us: for instance, the Apostle proves that we Christians are to seek for justification the same way that *Abraham* attained unto it, namely, by faith; for saith the scripture in his quotation, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.’ What was that which was accounted to him? his believing.”†

We may remark in these quotations, first, that Mr. Chillingworth asserts the doctrine of justification by faith, considered as an operative, working grace, that is, as he himself explains it, a “believing in God;” secondly, that he excludes works, not only from his notion of faith, but from justification; thirdly, that he therefore plainly teaches the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It may, however, be objected, that our author, in his account of faith in another passage, following the last quoted, makes it to suppose such an obedience as the gospel requires. And it is true enough, that his manner of writing in several places may easily lead his readers into an error on this subject, which he himself evidently disclaims. The following quotation will make this very evident: “We will in the next place,” says he, “consider what kind of obedience that of faith is, and in what sense it may be said to justify us. What satisfaction I conceive may be given to this query, I will set down in this assertion: that since justification, even as it includes remission of sins, is that promise,

* Serm. on Gal. v. 5.

† Serm. on Gal. v. 5.

to perform which unto us, God has obliged himself in the new covenant; it must necessarily presuppose in the person to be justified, such an obedience as the gospel requires; namely, first, repentance from dead works, a conversion to a new obedience, obedience of those moral commands which are ratified in the gospel, and a relying upon Christ as the only meritorious cause of our justification and salvation, by a particular evangelical faith. And all this, I say, is preredquired in the person who is made capable of justification, either in the exercise, or at least in *preparatione cordis*, in a full resolution of the heart, and entire disposition of the mind." *

A superficial view of this passage would lead one to conclude that, notwithstanding the above quotations, this author was, after all, an advocate for justification by faith and future obedience; whereas a careful examination of it, will yield a clear demonstration of the very reverse. For, first, the obedience which he requires, in order to justification, is not that which consisteth in a life of Christian holiness, but merely a turning away from dead works to the commands of Christ. Secondly, it is not that obedience which is subsequent to justifying faith, but that which goes before it; for this is the order in which he has expressly placed it. Thirdly, and above all, he does not insist on the necessity of any *actual* performance even of this, in order to justification, for he allows it to be sufficient, if there be "a full resolution of the heart and entire disposition of the mind." The whole, therefore, amounts to this, that when faith in Christ is accompanied, as true faith always is,

with a full resolution of the heart against sin, and an entire disposition of mind in favour of holiness, it is justifying faith; God for Christ's sake imputeth it for righteousness, independently on that actual obedience which it is afterwards to produce. But as some time may elapse between a sinner's beginning to seek justification, and his believing on Christ for it, in the manner our author states, he must, undoubtedly during such time turn away from dead works to the commands of the gospel, and certainly *will* do so if his repentance be sincere. As, however, there is no necessity arising from the nature of God's economy in our justification, for such time elapsing, our author, (carefully attending to this point,) allows that there is no absolute necessity for any *actual* performances even of this kind: for supposing a sinner at once to renounce all his iniquities, to yield himself up unto God, and to rely on Christ as our author describes, he is as completely justified by the free grace of God in Christ, as though ever so much time had elapsed between his renouncing of sin, and his believing on Christ for pardon.

The next testimony to this grand Christian doctrine shall be taken from no less a writer than Mr. Locke; who, though a *layman*, employed his learning and abilities on various subjects in divinity. How great a stress he lays on good works, is well known; yet in his paraphrase and notes on the sacred epistles, he constantly affirmeth that justification is by faith alone. Take the following as mere specimens: "To him that by his works attains not righteousness, but only believeth on God, who justifieth him, being ungodly, to him justification is a favour of grace, because his believing is accounted to him for righteousness, or perfect obedi-

ence." Again, paraphrasing the words of St. Paul, (Gal. ii. 15, 16,) "We who are by nature Jews, born under the instruction and guidance of the law, God's peculiar people, and not of the unclean and profligate race of the gentiles, abandoned to sin and death, knowing that a man cannot be justified by the deeds of the law, but solely by faith in Jesus Christ." Almost innumerable quotations to the same effect might be made from this author; and whoever will carefully examine his note on Ephesians ii. 8, 9, may receive ample satisfaction, that while he insisted on obedience as the fruit of faith, he was a uniform advocate for the justification of a sinner by faith alone.

Dr. Isaac Barrow, a divine equally strenuous in the cause of good works, and a determined enemy to the doctrine of faith licentiously understood, having given us an account of faith, which, whether it is thought just or not, will by no means admit of future obedience being implied in the term, proceeds to say, "It is a ground of divine acceptation and goodwill, ('Abraham believed God,' saith St. James, 'and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God,') it is a mean or instrument, (so it is constantly represented,) by which we are justified, obtain God's favour, and remission of our sins." * Again "That Christianity should (upon so slender a condition or performance as that of faith) tender unto all persons indifferently, however culpable or flagitious their former lives had been, a plenary remission of sins, and reception into God's favour, did seem an unreasonable and implausible thing to many: the Jews could not

* Serm. I. on Rom. v. 1.

well conceive or relish, that any man should so easily be translated into a state equal or superior to that, which they took themselves peculiarly to enjoy: the gentiles themselves (especially such as conceited well of their own wisdom and virtue) could hardly digest it: Celsus, in Origin, could not imagine or admit that bare faith should work such a miracle, as presently to turn a dissolute person into a saint, beloved of God, and designed to happiness." That Celsus, a pagan, and an enemy to Christ, could neither imagine nor admit this, we cannot wonder. O ye Christian Celsuses! men who profess, or even *teach* the Christian religion! how long will ye prove yourselves to be under the influence of *pagan* ignorance respecting the method which God has established for the justification of sinners; and, not only of *ignorance* respecting it, but of *enmity* to it, by neither *imagining* nor *admitting* this clearly revealed doctrine of the gospel of Christ!

Of this character, however, was not the learned Dr. Chandler, whose authority we will next produce. In his introduction to the epistle to the Galatians, he has the following words: "The doctrine which this apostle every-where preached among the gentiles, was, that the reception and belief of the gospel of Christ, was of itself alone sufficient to justify them." Again, in a note on Gal. ii. 16, "To be justified by the faith of Christ, is to be esteemed and accepted of God as persons free from all past obligation, immediately as the consequence of a sincere belief of the gospel, not only without the merit of any past works, but contrary to deserts of past sinfulness and guilt; and in this sense, faith alone, without any consideration of works whatsoever, is that by which sinners are justified."

Perhaps it will not be deemed necessary to multiply testimonies of this kind, which might easily be done. We will conclude with that of Dr. Whitby: "Justification is by faith alone, without respect to any of our works." *—Short, but clear and full. And if any one wish to see his testimony more at large, he has only to read his preface to the epistle to the Galatians, where he professedly argues against all works, even those which are evangelical, being joined with faith, as necessary to justification; and very clearly proves, what he here asserts, that it is by faith alone, without respect to any of our works, that a sinner is justified before God.

And now we come to a close of the argument against the method of interpreting the scriptures reviewed in the preceding section, which supposes the term faith to denote both faith and obedience. It throws down the wise and gracious method of justification which God has established, and sets up another in its place, the terms of which are wholly indeterminate, incapable of being defined, and utterly uncertain. It stands in direct opposition to the *letter* of all the numerous scriptures in which justification by faith is affirmed; not one of these passages intimating that obedience as well as faith is intended. It is unsupported by one single instance of holy scripture in which the term (πίστις) faith occurs; the term *never* signifying both faith and obedience in *any* case; much less with respect to justification, in which works are expressly excluded. It is inconsistent with the scope of St. Paul's reasoning on the subject in his epistle to the Romans, and with the objections which he

* Note on Rom. iii. 28.

supposes to be made against his doctrine. It derives no support from any explication of the term by the apostle, nor even from the slightest intimation, although the fairest and most pressing occasions frequently present themselves; especially when he answers objections. It is demonstrably false with respect to the instance of faith fixed upon by the apostle; Abraham's faith, in that particular case, being nothing more than his believing the Lord, without any act of obedience being joined with it. It sets up a method by which the justification of a guilty and helpless creature is impossible. It supposes that a man may be a true believer, and yet unjustified, condemned, and exposed to eternal death. It is contrary to numerous plain facts which stand upon sacred record; facts which demonstrate that justification is granted immediately to faith, and is *not* suspended upon that obedience which follows it. And, to conclude, it is unsupported by the authority of all great divines, ancient and modern, with a very few exceptions; the most learned of our own divines, even those who have been thought to lean too much to works, yet giving the clearest testimony, when they express their thoughts precisely, to the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Human reasoning, like human beings, is extremely imperfect. But so far as the writer can judge, any one of these arguments throws an insuperable obstacle in the way of the opinion which they controvert; several of them prove it to be false; and the whole will form a sufficient vindication of the literal and obvious sense of the holy scriptures, on the subject before us, against this heterodox method of interpreting them. So far then we may venture to conclude, that the doctrine

of justification by the imputation of faith for righteousness, stands firm on the authority of the word of God, unmoved by the erroneous principles of men. But we have now to encounter a second method of interpreting the scriptures, contained in the first section; a method which stands equally opposed to justification by faith, or the imputation of faith for righteousness. This, as before said, must be the work of another section.

SECTION III.

The imputation of faith for righteousness farther vindicated against a second method of interpreting those scriptures which assert it.

THE method of interpretation which we are now to investigate is this: that when faith is said to justify or to be imputed for righteousness, a figure of speech is used which puts the act for the object; that faith itself, therefore, is not meant, but the object of faith; and that this object is the righteousness or obedience of Christ.

Veneration for some great names (great, because adorned with learning and piety) will not allow us to treat this opinion with all that severity of logical sarcasm, of which, were we so disposed, it would form too proper a subject. Let us, therefore, proceed to the investigation of it with all the tenderness of animadversion which is consistent with justice to the subject. And let it be particularly remarked, that nothing in the following investigation

is designed to operate against the doctrine of salvation in general, and of justification in particular, through the only meritorious atonement and intercession of the Lord Jesus; a doctrine this, which our subject will require us all along to suppose, and in some future section particularly to assert and vindicate.

First, then, this method of interpreting the scriptures in question, supposes a figure of speech, which, upon examination, we think, will be found to have no existence in human language. For although the several Christian virtues, considered as graces, or gracious habits of mind, are properly, and with considerable beauty of style, put for their object, yet it will be found that the exercise of these graces, in which the mind performeth real acts, never is employed to denote the object of such acts, nor can be without a more palpable absurdity than any of which language is capable. Fear, hope, joy, understood as Christian virtues, are graces, or gracious habits of the soul; the exercise of these virtues in acts of the mind, is to fear, to hope, to rejoice. Now God is very properly, by an elegant figure of speech, said to be our fear, our hope, our joy, considered as the object of these virtues; but how little claim to either elegance or propriety there would be in making the *exercise* of these virtues to denote the *object*, may easily be discovered by making trial of such a figure. "Obadiah feared God greatly;"* "I have hoped in thy word," says the Psalmist; "I rejoiced in the Lord," says St. Paul. Now what should we think of any one, should he affirm, that Obadiah's fearing God, does not mean his act of fear-

ing, but some object of that act, and not the object mentioned neither, but some other, say, the wrath of his master Ahab,—that David's hoping in the word of God, does not mean his hoping, but the object of it; that object, however, not the word of God, here mentioned, but some thing else which is not mentioned at all,—that St. Paul's rejoicing in the Lord, does not signify his rejoicing, but the object of his rejoicing, say, the attention which his beloved Philippians paid to his necessities! yet all this would be perfectly as just as to affirm, that Abraham's believing the Lord, does not mean his believing, but the object of his believing, which object, however, is not the Lord, but the righteousness of Christ; the whole of this absurdity necessarily resulting from the supposition that there is a figure of speech which puts the act itself for the object of that act. All those forms of speech which have been produced to support this figure have this essential defect, that they only put the *name* of a virtue or an act, expressed by a *noun*, for the object of that virtue or act; whereas Abraham's believing, which was counted to him for righteousness, is the *act itself* expressed by a *verb*; and in order to support by instances the supposition that the *object* of his believing is intended, it is necessary to produce forms of expression, in which the very acting itself expressed by a verb is put for the object of such acting. No instance of this kind occurs in the holy scriptures; nor would it be any great presumption to affirm, that such a form of speech cannot possibly exist in any language, being wholly inconsistent with every rule of propriety.

Secondly, that the object of faith is not meant, is demonstrable; for of all the objects of Abra-

ham's believing, which was counted to him for righteousness, there is not one which can with any reason be said to be imputed to him for righteousness. "He believed in the Lord," says Moses. Jehovah was therefore the object of his faith, but surely no one will affirm that Jehovah was imputed to him for righteousness. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, that Isaac should be born to him of Sarah, and that his seed should be like the stars of heaven for multitude, being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able to perform. Here the objects of his faith are, the promise, and the power of God; but no one can imagine that these objects of his faith were ever counted to him for righteousness. In a word, Jehovah, his promise, his power, a son by Sarah, and a numerous progeny by him, are the only objects mentioned by Moses and St. Paul, of that particular act of faith; and not one of these will answer for imputation. And should it be contended, that in this numerous progeny he had respect to Christ, the promised seed, still there is no object that will serve for imputation; for this opinion itself does not teach us that it is Christ himself that is imputed for righteousness.

Thirdly, that faith is intended, and no object of faith whatever, will appear from these two considerations: that, when Moses and the two apostles inform us, that Abraham believed God, they evidently mean, he gave credit to God's promise; and that when they add, it was imputed to him for righteousness, the meaning is that Abraham's believing, his giving credit to the divine promise, was thus imputed to him. The plain sense therefore is this, (if indeed, it can be expressed any plainer than as it stands in the text) Abraham gave

credit to the promise of Jehovah, and his giving credit to it was counted to him for righteousness. And what rule of grammar, what figure of rhetoric, what liberty of poetic composition itself, would justify the assertion, that this plain declaration means, "Abraham's believing, does not mean his believing; and that which was imputed to him for righteousness, was not his faith, but the object of it."

Fourthly, the characters of Abraham's faith as described by St. Paul, agree admirably to faith itself, but are altogether inapplicable to any object of faith whatever. It was "a believing in God who quickeneth the dead; a believing in hope against hope; a faith in which he was not weak; a not staggering at the promise; a strong faith; a full persuasion that what God had promised he was able to perform."* In the same chapter other characters of faith are mentioned. "It is a believing on him that justifieth the ungodly; on him that raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead; a walking in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham."† Now let any one apply these several characters of the faith which is said to be imputed for righteousness, to the obedience of Christ, or indeed, to any object of faith whatsoever, and then say, whether faith itself or some object of faith, was intended by the apostle.

Fifthly, this method of interpreting the scriptures, is highly dangerous to the whole system of revealed religion; more especially to those parts of it which are purely the subjects of faith, and therefore offensive to the proud sons of reason. What particular branch of Christian theology can we fix

* Rom. iv. 17—21.

† Rom. iv. 4, 5—24.

upon, which might not, by such a liberty, be pruned and pruned again, till stripped of all its beauty and excellence, and even torn away from the stock of evangelical truth on which it grows. Why are so many complaints made against those who endeavour to shake the foundations of truth, by rejecting the obvious sense of the scriptures, calling it figurative language, oriental style, compliance with Jewish notions &c.? What justice soever there may be in these complaints, if we expound the scriptures, which assert justification by faith, in the manner now under consideration, the persons complained of, may justly retort upon us as taking a liberty, as great, as unlicensed, in explaining the doctrines of revelation, as any they do or can take. We have already seen, how glad some would be to make it out, that another figure is used in these scriptures, which puts a part for the whole; that obedience may be included in faith, and so, after all, set up justification by works. And if divines, and even learned commentators, will continue to affirm, that faith itself is not imputed for righteousness, but its object, they certainly throw wide open the door for the opposite error, that faith is not thus imputed, but its fruit. And thus the very strongest passages of the word of God on this interesting subject to mankind, are made weak and useless, like weapons blunted and broke, through our folly in using them, or intirely wrested out of our hands. Thus the grand barrier against justification by works, through our deserting it, is seized by the enemy and broken down; and justification by faith (oh, hear it not ye noble spirits of the reformation) justification by faith is at once annihilated. But take comfort still, ye that contend earnestly for the faith once

delivered to the saints. For though, as founded in the false opinions of men, this doctrine may be shaken and even fall; yet, as founded on the rock of revelation, it stands firm and secure, and will stand for ever. Neither the object nor the fruit of faith is meant, but faith itself. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness."

Sixthly, had the inspired writers intended to inform us that by faith, they did not mean faith itself, when they affirm that it is imputed for righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ, is it not reasonable to suppose they would have given us some intimation of it? Instead of this, however, Moses speaks of it in a way which bears not the most remote mark of such an intention. And can it be imagined that when he wrote the words, "Abraham believed" &c. his meaning was, that it was not his believing, but the object of it, which was thus imputed to him? or can we conceive, that the Israelites for whom he wrote could so understand him? St. James is so far from intimating that he understood them so, or wished that his readers might, that he quotes the words as an argument that genuine faith will produce obedience to God, as Abraham's did; he informs us that the faith which was counted to Abraham for righteousness, was productive of good works, and that by works his faith was made perfect. Certain proofs these, that he understood Moses to mean faith itself, and that he means the same in quoting and applying his words. But if neither the Jewish lawgiver, nor the great advocate for Christian obedience, gives us any intimation favourable to the scheme we have in hand, surely, if it have any foundation in truth

the apostle of the gentiles will? Far from it; he perpetually affirms, that faith is imputed for righteousness; and though he enters minutely into the subject, and rests upon it a great weight of argument relative to the method of our justification, yet does he not write one word in his whole discourse expressly on the subject, that suggests the most distant idea he means any thing but faith itself. And would it not be unaccountably strange, that three inspired writers, on a subject so vastly important as the method of our justification before God, should unanimously say one thing, and mean another, without ever giving us the least hint of what their real meaning is! who can think them chargeable with a style of writing so infallibly calculated to lead into error all who understand their plain words, and not their concealed meaning.

Seventhly, as the apostle's argument on the subject of justification, was with his brethren the Jews, it is plain that he must use the words of Moses, respecting the justification of their great patriarch, in the sense that the Jews understood those words, or if in some other sense, that he must have informed them of it; but he does not inform them of any other sense, but merely takes up the words, and without putting any other sense on them, than that which is literal and obvious, founds on them one of his arguments on justification by faith. It follows, that he used them in the sense in which the Jews understood them. Now, is it possible for any one to imagine, that, the Jews understood these words of Moses to mean, it was not the *faith* of Abraham that was imputed for righteousness, but the object of it, and this object was the righteousness of the promised Messiah?

Lastly, against this method of interpreting the

scriptures on this subject, we have the testimony of by far the greatest number of the best divines; who are so far from supporting it, that, previous to the reformation, they do not appear to have had any knowledge of it, as they uniformly assert the imputation of faith for righteousness, without even intimating that the object of faith is thought by some to be intended.

One of the most popular books on the imputation of Christ's righteousness,* produces testimonies which clearly enough, we confess, support this novel method of explaining the scriptures on this subject. But that it is novel, is almost evident from the date of those testimonies; for not one of them, which yield it the least support, is earlier than the reformation. Earlier than that period, indeed only three authorities are quoted; and leaving out the interpolations, which are far from being allowable in giving the opinions and words of an author, two of them assert justification by faith in a way to which we heartily subscribe; and the other, justification by Jesus Christ the righteous, in a way, which though capable of being misconstrued, yet, taken in a sober sense, yields not a shred of evidence to the opinion before us. So that beyond the late period of the reformation, so far as the writer can learn, the strange fancy, that it is not faith, but its object, that is imputed for righteousness, had no existence. To this effect also are the words of a great writer,† though but little known. "This interpretation we contend for (according to which, the word *faith* or believing, is to be taken properly

* Hervey's Theron and Aspasio, Let. III.

† Mr. John Goodwin, one of the ejected ministers. See his excellent treatise on justification, Chap. II.

in all the passages mentioned, and not tropically or metonymically) was the common interpretation anciently received and followed by the principal lights (I mean the fathers) of the church of God from the primitive times, and for fifteen hundred years together (as far as my reading and memory together will assist me) was never questioned or contradicted. Neither did the contrary opinion ever look out into the world, at least was never contended for) till the yesterday of the last age. So that it is but a calumny or evil report, brought upon the opinion, and interpretation of this scripture which we maintain (*unworthy the tongue or pen of any learned and sober man*) to make either Arminius or Socinus, the authors or founders of either. And for this last hundredth years and upwards, from about Luther's and Calvin's times, the fairest stream of interpreters so runs, as to water and refresh the same interpretation. You will be easily inclined, I presume, to believe both the one and the other, that both former and latter times have been friends and favourers of the interpretation given, if you will please, with diligence and without partiality, to ponder and examine these few testimonies and passages following, as they stand in their several authors respectively.*

“TERTULLIAN, who lived and wrote about the year one hundred and ninety four, in his fifth book against Marcion, writeth thus: ‘but how the children of faith? or of whose faith, if not of Abra-

*The reader, without any apology, will doubtless approve, both of the quotation of these testimonies, and of the remarks of our author upon them. It will not, however, be thought necessary to refer to the book and page of the several authors here quoted; much less to transcribe their own words, some in Greek, others in Latin, as they stand in our author's margin.

ham's? for if Abraham believed God, and that was imputed to him for righteousness, and he thereby deserved the name of a father of many nations, we by believing God more, are therefore justified as Abraham was.' The same father, in his tract of *Patience*, 'Abraham believed God, and was accounted righteous by him, but he tried his faith by patience, when he was commanded to offer his son.' Therefore *Tertullian's* opinion directly is, that that faith which is said to be imputed to Abraham for righteousness, is faith properly taken, and not the righteousness of Christ apprehended by faith, because he saith that God tried his faith by patience, which cannot be applied to the righteousness of Christ."

"ORIGIN, who lived about the year two hundred and three, in his fourth book upon the Romans, writing on chap. iv. 3. speaketh thus: 'it seems therefore, that in this place also, that whereas many faiths (that is, many acts of believing) of Abraham had gone before, now all his faith was recollected and united together, and so was accounted to him for righteousness.' And in the same place, not long after, he hath more words to like purpose. Therefore he joined with *Tertullian* in the interpretation of this scripture."

"JUSTIN MARTYR, who lived before them both, and not long after the apostle John's time, about the year one hundred and thirty,* in his dialogue or

* We have already seen the testimony of St. Clement, in the tenth argument of the preceding section; a testimony which equally bears against either the fruit of faith being included in the term, or the object of faith intended. And this St. Clement lived in the time, and was a fellow-labourer with St. Peter and St. Paul; and is mentioned, it is more than probable, in the epistle to the Philippians, chap. iv. 3. His may therefore be

disputation had at Ephesus with Trypho the Jew, it seems led them both the way to that interpretation. 'Abraham carried not away the testimony (or commendation) of righteousness, because of his circumcision, but because of his faith. For before he was circumcised, this was pronounced of him, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.' "

" CHRYSOSTOM, who lived somewhat after the year three hundred and eighty, in the beginning of his ninth sermon upon the Romans; 'having spoken' (saith he, meaning Paul in the former part of that chapter) 'many and great things concerning Abraham and his faith,' &c. And a little after, 'wherefore,' saith he, 'was it written, but that we might learn, that we also are justified, as he was, because we have believed the same God?' the same father again, upon Gal. iii. 'for what was he the worse for not being under the law? nothing at all, for his faith was sufficient unto him for righteousness! If Abraham's faith was sufficient unto him for righteousness, it must needs be imputed by God for righteousness unto him; for it is this imputation from God, that must make that sufficiency of it unto Abraham. That which will not pass in account with God for righteousness, will never be sufficient for righteousness unto the creature.' "

" SAINT AUGUSTINE, who lived about the year three hundred and ninety, gives frequent testimony in his works, both to the opinion and interpretation contested for. Upon Psal. cxlviii. 'for we by believing have found that which they (the

regarded as the best and most ancient testimony to the doctrine of justification by faith; excepting that of the inspired writers only. Our author probably had not seen it.

Jews) lost by not believing. For Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; therefore his opinion clearly is, that it was Abraham's faith or believing, properly taken, that was imputed to him for righteousness; and not the righteousness of Christ. For that faith of his, which was so imputed, he opposeth to the unbelief of the Jews, whereby they lost the grace and favour of God. Now the righteousness of Christ is not opposed to unbelief, but *faith*, properly taken. Again, writing upon Psal. lxx. 'For I believe in him that justifieth the ungodly, that my faith may be imputed unto me for righteousness.' Where by faith he cannot mean the righteousness of Christ, because he calleth it his own before imputation: whereas the righteousness of Christ can no ways be imagined to be any man's, till it be made his by imputation. The same father yet again, in his tract of Nature and Grace: 'but if Christ died not in vain, the ungodly is justified in him alone: to whom, believing in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.' And yet once more, in his sixty-eighth sermon of Time, (if that piece be his,) 'Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.' See, without any work, he is justified by faith, and whatsoever was possible to have been conferred upon him by the observation of the law, his believing alone gave it all unto him. Certainly this author, (whoever he was,) by the word credulity, (for so the Latin word signifieth, whereby he expresseth that faith which was imputed to Abraham for righteousness, could not mean or understand the righteousness of Christ."

"PRIMASIUS, about the year five hundred, upon Rom. iv. 3. 'tam magna fuit dono dei fides Abra-

hæ, ut et pristina ei peccata donarentur, et sola præ omni justitia doceretur accepta:’ that is, ‘Abraham’s faith, by the gift of God, was so great, that both his former sins were forgiven him, and this *faith* of his alone, preferred in acceptation before all righteousness.’ By Abraham’s faith alone, he cannot mean Christ’s righteousness.

“BEDA, who lived somewhat before the year seven hundred, upon Rom. iv. 5, hath these words: ‘What faith, but that which the apostle in another place fully defineth: neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but faith which worketh by love; not any faith; but that which worketh by love; certainly that faith, which Paul defineth or describeth to be a faith working by love, cannot be conceived to be the righteousness of Christ; and yet this faith it was, in the judgment of this author, that was imputed unto Abraham for righteousness.’

“HAYMO, about the year eight hundred and forty, in Rom. iv. 3: ‘Because he believed God it was imputed unto him for righteousness, that is, unto remission of sins, because by that faith, wherewith he believed, he was made righteous.’

“ANSELM, archbishop of *Canterbury*, about the year one thousand and ninety, upon Rom. iv. 3: ‘That he (meaning Abraham) believed so strongly, was by God imputed for righteousness unto him: that is, &c. by this believing he was imputed righteous before God.’

“From all these testimonies it is apparent, that that interpretation of this scripture which we contend for, hath anciently ruled in the church of God, and no man found to open his mouth, or lift up his pen against it, till it had been established on the throne for above a thousand years.—Come we

to the times of the reformation; here we shall find the right and title of it still maintained by men of greatest authority and learning.

“LUTHER, in Gal. iii. 6: ‘Christian righteousness is an affiance or faith in the Son of God; which affiance is imputed unto righteousness for Christ’s sake.’ And in the same place, not long after: ‘God for Christ’s sake, in whom I have begun to believe, accounts this (my) imperfect faith, for perfect righteousness.’ Doubtless this author was for the interpretation given; or else his words and he were not of the same mind.

“BUCER, upon Rom. iv. 3: ‘Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; that is, he accounted this faith or believing, for righteousness unto him. So that by believing he obtained this, that God esteemed him a righteous man.’

“PETER MARTYR declares himself of the same judgment, upon Rom. iv. 3: ‘To be imputed for righteousness, in another sense, signifieth that by which we ourselves are reckoned in the number of the righteous.’ And this Paul attributes to faith only.

“CALVIN abetteth the same interpretation with as high a hand as any of his fellows, upon Rom. iv. 3: ‘Wherefore Abraham by believing doth only embrace the grace tendered to him, that it might not be in vain. If this be imputed unto him for righteousness, it follows, that he is no otherwise righteous, but as trusting, or relying upon the goodness of God, he hath boldness to hope for all things from him.’ Again, upon ver. 5: ‘Faith is reputed for righteousness, not because it carrieth any merit from us, but because it apprehends the goodness of God.’” If all this be not home to the point in question, I request the reader that desires further satisfaction concerning the judgment of this

author therein, to peruse and ponder what he hath commented at large upon the sixth verse of Gal. iii. Whosoever thinks it prejudicial to Calvin, that he should be thought to hold imputation of faith (in a proper sense) for righteousness, may, if he will, pity him, and lament over him; but without an index expurgatorius, (and that in folio,) can never relieve him. In the place last mentioned, (to admit many other passages and expressions there extant, as pregnant for that imputation of faith which is pleaded for as eyes can look upon) he describes at large that faith of Abraham (which is there said to be imputed for righteousness) by the nature and property of it; and differenceth it from other persuasions that men may have of the truth of God. By which carriage of the business it is as manifest, as manifestation itself knows how to make any thing manifest, that his thoughts were never tempted with any insinuation either of a tropical or metonymical sense in the word faith: but that the plain, ready, and grammatical signification, was that which he wrought upon, and framed his interpretation unto.

“MUSCULUS, as far as his judgment and learning will reach, engageth himself for this *imputation* also. In his common place of *justification*, sect. 5. ‘This faith should be in high respect and esteem with us; not in regard of the proper quality of it, but in regard of the purpose and decree of God, whereby he hath decreed for Christ’s sake, to impute it (this faith) for righteousness unto those that believe in him.’ The same author, upon Gal. iii. 6: ‘What did he (Abraham) that should be imputed unto him for righteousness, but only this, that he believed God?’—words plain enough to our purpose; yet behold from the same pen, more plain

than they in another place. Upon Gen. xv. 6. you shall find words of this importance: 'He so speaks of Abraham's faith, that manifest it is, that he disputes of that faith wherewith a man believeth not God simply, but in, or on God.' Where, though he makes a difference between believing God simply, and believing in God; yet evident it is, that if there be either trope or metonymy in the word *believing*, he was not aware of it, because he interprets it of such a faith as properly notes the act, not the object of believing. Again, afterwards, in the same place: 'But when he firmly believed God promising, that very faith was imputed to him, in the place, or stead, of righteousness; that is, he was of God reputed righteous for that faith, and absolved from all his sins.'

"BULLINGER likewise gives the right hand of fellowship to the same interpretation, upon Rom. iv. 'Abraham committed himself unto God by believing, and this very thing was imputed unto him for righteousness.' And the second time, upon Gal. iii. 6: 'It was imputed unto him for righteousness; that is, that very faith of Abraham was imputed to him for righteousness, whilst he was yet uncircumcised.'

"GAULTER comes behind none of the former in avouching the grammatical against the rhetorical interpretation. Upon Rom. iv. 4: 'Abraham believed God, and he, viz. God, imputed unto him this faith for righteousness.'

"ARETIUS no whit digresseth from the former expositions upon Rom. iv: 'He imputed righteousness unto him, which is as much as to say, he so far accepted or thought well of his faith, as thereupon to account him righteous with an imputative righteousness.' Where note, by the way, he doth

not call an imputative or imputed righteousness, any thing that is righteousness properly so called, any righteousness that should be in one person inherently, and become another's by imputation, (neither do I remember the phrase of an imputed righteousness in that sense, in any classic author,) but by an imputative righteousness, he means, somewhat imputed or accounted by God for righteousness, which literally and in strictness of consideration is not such. Again, the same author more plainly and succinctly, upon ver. 22, of the same chapter, 'A faith so firm and pious, was imputed unto Abraham for righteousness.'

"ILLYRICUS forsakes not his fellow-interpreters in this point. Upon Rom. iv. 3: 'That same believing was imputed unto him for righteousness.' And afterwards, that same poor begging faith, apprehending the righteousness of Christ, was imputed unto him instead of a proper righteousness.

"PELLICANUS breaks not this rank, upon Gen. xv. 6: 'Abraham simply believed the word of God, and required not a sign of the Lord; and God imputed that very faith unto Abraham himself for righteousness, whereby God is inclinable or propense to do us good.'

"HANNIUS, another reformed divine, sets to his seal that the avouched interpretation is true. On Rom. iv. 3: 'The faith whereby Abraham believed God promising, was imputed unto him for righteousness.'

"BEZA himself, upon the same scripture, is as deep in the same way as any. 'Here,' saith he, 'the business is, concerning that, that was imputed to him, viz. his faith.'

"JUNIUS and TREMELLIUS are likewise of the former conspiracy against the tropical interpreta-

tion. On Gen. xv. 6: 'God esteemed (or accounted) him for righteous, though wanting righteousness wherewith to stand before God, and reckoned this in the stead or place of righteousness, that he embraced the promise with a firm belief.

"PARÆUS (the last we shall name of foreign divines) dealeth out this interpretation as freely as his fellows. On Rom. iv. 3: 'We understand by the name or word faith, (which is said to be imputed unto Abraham for righteousness) Abraham's acquietation or resting, not in himself, or in his own merits, but in the promise and graciousness of God.

"Neither are there wanting from amongst ourselves, men of the soundest learning and judgment, holding forth the light of the same interpretation also. DR. ROBERT ABBOT (afterwards bishop of Sarum) in his apology against Bishop, Part I. cap. 9, not far from the beginning; having set down those passages of the apostle, Rom. iv. 5, 6. he addeth as followeth: 'In which words we see, how the apostle affirmeth (accordingly as I said) an imputation of righteousness without works: which he expresseth to be, the reputed of faith for righteousness; for that thereby we obtain remission and forgiveness of sins. Again not long after; for in the imputation of righteousness without works, what is it that is reputed for righteousness? faith (saith the apostle) is reputed for righteousness. Tell us then, Mr. Bishop, is faith with you reputed for righteousness without works? spit out man, and tell us, whether in your first or second justification you hold that a man for his faith is reputed righteous, &c. (with more of like importance in the page following.) He that will undertake to divide between this author, and the opinion we contend

for, must be more severe than to give a man leave to be of his own mind.'

"Dr. PRESTON also, maketh himself a stranger to the tropical interpretation of this scripture, and embraces that which is literal and proper without scruple or question. In his treatise of God's all-sufficiency, page 12, 13: 'In this sense faith is said to be accounted (or imputed) for righteousness. Abraham believed God, Gen. xv. 6. God indeed made the same proposition; that he doth here for substance, he tells him what he would do for him; and (saith the text) Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now it was accounted unto him for righteousness, chiefly in this sense, as it is interpreted, Rom. iv. that his very taking of the promise, and accepting of the covenant, in that he did receive that which God gave, that put him within the covenant, and therefore the Lord reckoned him a righteous man, even for that very acceptation and believing. But that is not all: but likewise he accounteth faith to him for righteousness, because faith doth sanctify and make a man righteous,' &c. So that it is evident (if there be such a thing as evidence in the writings and opinions of men) that this man's thoughts were never so much as tempted to conceit that the apostle should tropologize or metonymize in the word faith, or believing in this scripture.

"Mr. JOHN FORBS, late pastor of the English church at Middleburgh, a man of known gravity, piety, and learning, in his treatise of Justification, cap. 28, page 135, hath these words, 'For faith in this sentence (meaning where it is said that faith is imputed unto righteousness) is in my opinion to be taken properly, in that sense whereby in itself it is distinguished both from the word whereby it is

begotten, and from the object of it in the word, which is Christ.'

"Thus," says Mr. Goodwin, "I have cited the authority of many authors by way of collateral assurance, for the securing the literal and proper interpretation of this scripture." And to these many more might be added were it necessary. Instead of this however, let us conclude these arguments with an acknowledgment of gratitude to God, that such a cloud of witnesses give evidence to this important doctrine of divine revelation, in opposition to the two great methods of corrupting it, which we have had under consideration; and, above all, that God has been pleased to reveal this doctrine in such a way, as to furnish abundance of clear and unanswerable considerations for the vindication of it, against opinions which in appearance approach the nearest to it, but which in reality are utterly incompatible with it. If deep concern for this doctrine has not produced too favourable an opinion of the arguments which support it, they prove beyond the possibility of a successful contradiction, that the two methods of interpretation which they controvert, are erroneous,—that the scriptures contained in the first section, and all others of the same kind, are to be understood literally of FAITH,—that the doctrine of justification by the imputation of faith for righteousness, is, therefore, the doctrine of God, and, as a principal foundation stone, in the grand fabric of divine truth, is established and settled on the impregnable rock of clear and express revelation.

SECTION IV.

The doctrine of justification by faith unfolded, or a statement of the sense in which faith is imputed for righteousness.

THAT justification by faith, and the imputation of faith for righteousness, denote exactly the same thing, in the inspired writings, is a point upon which all are agreed; and that both of them imply the plenary forgiveness of past sins, with all the privileges belonging to it. To unfold this interesting doctrine, to state with clearness in what sense it is that God imputeth faith for righteousness, or, in other words, justifies us by faith, it will therefore be necessary first of all, to explain the terms, *justification, faith, righteousness, and imputation.*

The term justification, in its strictly proper sense, signifies the clearing of an innocent person from a charge of guilt which is unjustly preferred against him. In this sense, however, the term cannot be used with respect to man in relation to God; for as all are actually guilty before him, the charge of guilt is not unjustly preferred against us; nor, consequently, can we be cleared from the charge as innocent persons. In this sense, the Psalmist affirms, that "No man living can be justified in the sight of God."* The term justification is therefore applied to forgiveness of sins, not because forgiveness clears us from the charge of

guilt, for it necessarily supposes us to be guilty, but because when God forgiveth our sins, he treats us as though we were not guilty, but perfectly innocent: as though we were not guilty, he does not punish us for our guilt; as though we were perfectly innocent, he confers upon us the privileges which our guilt has forfeited.*

The term faith, as faith justifies and saves, denotes, *a full assent of the mind to divine truth, produced by the assisting operation of the holy Spirit, accompanied by those dispositions which are essential to such an assent, and immediately producing obedience suitable to such truth.* This definition is not founded on any one particular passage of scripture, or class of scriptures; but on the whole account of that faith which justifies and saves, as we find it in all the several passages which

* There are several things in *sin* that, in the EDITOR's conceptions of it, ought to have a distinct consideration. There is the act or fact of sin, its nature, stain or filthiness, its power and dominion, its desert or demerit, and its guilt. Now the pardon of sin, according to its formal nature, takes away none of these, but only the guilt of it. The nature of sin is not taken away, sin is a "transgression of the law," and is so still, after as well as before pardon; pardon produces no change in the nature of sin, but only in the state of the pardoned sinner. Nor does pardon take away its desert or demerit; as long as sin is sin it deserves the wrath of God; the sins forgiven a penitent believer do in their own nature deserve everlasting punishment. Nor does pardon remove the power and dominion of sin, nor the stain or pollution of it: but it is the power of divine grace that destroys the reign of sin, and the Spirit of holiness that frees from the pollution of it. It remains then, that the pardon of sin removes the guilt of it only. Guilt is the sinner's obligation to punishment, or the wrath threatened by the law to the transgressor of it: pardon makes void this obligation, takes off the law-sentence which condemned him, and releaseth him from his obnoxiousness to wrath.

relate to its nature, objects, causes, and effects. It is probable, however, that this account of faith will be thought liable to some objections: particularly, that it does not specify the grand object of faith, Christ crucified; and that it does not express that trust in him which is doubtless implied in Christian faith. But in answer to the first of these objections, it should be considered, that, although Christ crucified is the grand object of faith under the Christian dispensation, yet under inferior dispensations, this glorious object is not so much known. It should be considered also, that in the gospel itself, Christ is presented as an object of faith in other points of view besides this one; as his being the Son of God, his resurrection from the dead, his divine authority; power, truth, love, and immutability. And more still, that although the Lord Jesus is the *only* object of faith with respect to merit, yet in *other* respects the scriptures present several objects; particularly, God as giving record concerning his Son; as raising him up from the dead; as giving promises, such for instance, as those which he gave to Abraham, and so likewise the divine power, wisdom, truth, goodness, yea, the very existence of God, and his moral government, are all objects of faith. It is true, indeed, and a great truth, that we are indebted to the mediation of Christ for every object of confidence, which the scriptures present to us, but it is a certain fact that they do present these several objects. To define faith, therefore, in such a way as to set up one object only, though that should be the grand object, is manifestly contrary to the word of God; and it would require us to admit the shocking idea, that all those human beings who have not

been favoured with a dispensation which presenteth this object, have necessarily perished. While on the other hand, *divine truth*, which the definition makes the general object of faith, includes the *grand object* presented by the gospel, with this advantage, that it does not exclude any other within the whole compass of what is called natural, or revealed religion; and therefore leaves the way of salvation through Christ open to men of all nations and ages, under what dispensation soever they may have lived. The second objection will be obviated by the consideration, that a full assent of the mind to this truth, *Christ was crucified for my sins*, implies a trusting in him, if taken in connexion with the other parts of the definition. And the reason why this trusting in Christ cannot be expressed in a definition of faith which is to be of universal application, is, that such a definition could not be applied to any but those who live under the Christian dispensation; excepting, perhaps, a very few, who were peculiarly enlightened under the Patriarchal and Jewish dispensations.

But while some may object that articles are left out of the definition which ought to have been put into it, others will probably object that some things are put into it, which ought to be left out. Let us review the whole.

Faith is an assent of the mind to divine truth. This is evident; for the scriptures no where intimate that justification or salvation is attainable by believing merely human testimony, but every-where by believing that which is divine. Thus Abraham was justified by believing the divine testimony respecting the birth of Isaac and a numerous progeny by him. And in the New Testament, unbelief

is the not crediting the divine testimony concerning Christ, the not believing the record which God hath given of his Son.*

Faith is a FULL assent to divine truth. Thus, again, in the case of Abraham: "He staggered

* The general object of faith, is, the whole system of truths contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which God hath revealed. Faith is a firm assent of the mind to the truth of these revelations, upon the testimony of God the revealer. His authority and veracity, is the immediate ground of faith, and it cannot rest on one more immoveable, for "the testimony of the Lord is sure;" "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater."—1 John v. 9.

The special and immediate object of faith is the person and mediation of Christ, as it is through him that a sinner must come to God, and take a fiducial hold of him as his reconciled father. It is in Christ crucified only, that God presents himself to our view as satisfied and reconciled. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."—2 Cor. v. 19. Faith assents to, and is a firm persuasion of, what the scriptures declare concerning the dignity of Christ's person, and mediatory performances, such as his supreme deity, incarnation, life, doctrine, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven, intercession there, and his being appointed to judge the world. These are the peculiarities of the gospel-revelation, which put an amiable and awful lustre upon it, and all of them special objects of faith.

Yet faith in Christ, as it justifies the sinner, looks only to his priestly office; it considers him as satisfying divine justice, and expiating sin, by the sacrifice of himself. Christ's fulfilling the broken law, appeasing justice, and suffering death, in the nature and place of sinful men, is the first thing a convinced sinner looks at, for deliverance from wrath and hell, and it is the only object of faith, so far as it is employed in the justification of him before God. Hence Christ is said to be "set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."—Rom. iii. 25. In the first promise of Christ, he was proposed to sinners in his priestly office, as bruised for sin, Gen. iii. 15; and it was this office of Christ that was shadowed forth by all the legal sacrifices, which were types of his perfect sacrifice. EDITOR.

not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being FULLY persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform, and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." This full assent was required by Philip of the eunuch, when he earnestly desired to be baptised: "If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayst."

This faith is *produced by the assisting operation of the holy Spirit*. The word *assisting* is here used to prevent the supposition, that the mind, in the work of faith, is altogether passive; for doubtless it is both passive and active: *passive* as it is the subject of divine influence; but *active* as it maketh a right use of this influence in actual believing. But that faith, in this scriptural sense, "is of the operation of God," is expressly affirmed by St. Paul;* and that it is of the operation of the Spirit of God, not merely of the word, the same apostle teaches, by informing us, that faith is "the fruit of the Spirit," as well as "love, joy, peace," and all the other Christian graces.† To the same purpose is the benediction he pronounces upon the Ephesians, in which faith, as well as peace and love, is supposed to come "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."‡ His prayer for the Thesalonians also, that God "Fulfil in them the work of faith with power," proves the same fact. And so likewise do the words of our Lord to Peter, when he informed him, that his faith in him as the Christ, the son of the living God, proceeded not from the teachings of men, nor from any other merely natural cause, but from a supernatural

* Col. ii. 12.

† Gal. v. 22.

‡ Eph. vi. 23. 2 Thes. i. 11.

revelation of God: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjonah; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

This full assent to divine truth, thus divinely produced, is accompanied with several gracious dispositions which are essential to such an assent. These dispositions, we learn from the scriptures, are, abhorrence of sin, love of righteousness, humiliation, and a lively trust in God, so far as he is made known to us; and consequently, a lively trust in him in the character of a saviour, as revealed to us in the gospel. *Abhorrence of sin*; for the faith which is of the operation of God, not only implies an assent to the great evil and danger of sin, but is actually founded in repentance; and hence in the gospel, repentance, if not in the order of time, at least in the order of things, is uniformly represented as preceding faith: we nowhere read, believe and repent, but always, "repent and believe." Abhorrence of sin is the very essence of repentance, and never fails to accompany justifying faith. And by necessary consequence, the love of righteousness attends it; and thus we read that by faith God purified the hearts of the first Christians, and that true faith worketh by love. Humiliation is another disposition attendant on faith; for the truths to which faith yields her full assent are of a humiliating nature. See this exemplified in the woman that was a sinner, whose tears of compunction so copiously flowed, and whose faith so instantly saved her. See it exemplified in the publican; he stands afar off; he lifts not so much as his eyes toward heaven; he smites his self-accusing breast; upbraids himself with his sins, and confides in the mercy of God alone. Doubtless he went down to his house justified; he

humbled himself, and God immediately exalted him. A lively trust in God accompanies this full assent to divine truth. Thus Abraham yielding full credit to the promise of God, respecting an event which was naturally an impossibility, trusted in the Almighty power of God for its accomplishment. And, indeed, the notion of trust or affiance as well as of assent, is included in the very word ($\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$) faith; and hence we find believing in Christ, and trusting in Christ, used in the New Testament as synonymous expressions.*

Lastly, that such faith as this will immediately produce obedience, cannot be the subject of the smallest doubt; whether we consider its nature, its objects, its divine cause, or its attending dispositions, cheerful obedience to the whole will of God, so far as revealed, must be its immediate effect.† Thus St. James teaches us, that the faith which produces not works is dead; that such was not the faith of Abraham, in whom we have at once the

* Eph. i. 12, 13.

† Saving faith, which is the leading principle of the divine life, has a great deal of energy in it. It is not a bare assent of the mind to the truth of the gospel, for that is not peculiar to true Christians; others may be as really persuaded as they, that the scriptures are the word of God, by examining into the grounds, reasons, and evidences of the Christian religion, which are such as are sufficient to satisfy all impartial and unprejudiced inquirers. Assent completes the notion of faith in a philosophical sense: but faith, in the Christian view of it, is efficacious, strongly “working by love,” Gal. v. 6, to the production of such love as prompts and constrains to the practice of all those good works commanded in the gospel, relating to God, our neighbours, and ourselves. In a genuine Christian, faith and righteous works are inseparable, so far as he has opportunity of performing them; and it is thereby evidenced, as the tree is by its fruit, the fire by its heat, and life by the pulse. EDITOR.

highest example of faith, and of its precious fruit, obedience. Let it not, however, be inferred from this article of our definition, that such obedience must be produced, before God will impute faith for righteousness. This is an error which we have already seen bruised beneath the feet of truth. No, this faith is imputed for righteousness by the established and unalterable counsel of the God of grace, in the very moment it existeth.

Let us hasten to explain the two remaining terms, *righteousness*, and *imputation*.

In the subject before us, the term *righteous* must be understood according to its strictly proper meaning; a perfect, unsinning obedience to the law of God. A righteousness this, which no man living has, for all have sinned.

The term *imputation* denotes, simply, the act of reckoning or accounting something to another; or, as we should say in common discourse, the putting of it down to his account. And in the scriptures quoted in the first section, to impute, is to put down to a man's account that which he does, for something else which he does not. This, indeed, is a familiar use of the phrase, a friend intends us a favour, but, for want of opportunity, fails to do it; we impute his intention to him for the actual performance; we reckon him to have done what he intended to do; we accept his kind intention in the stead of the thing intended. Thus we find the God of Israel, by an established law, imputing or reckoning to the Levites, one thing which they did, for another which they did not. "Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for an inheri-

tance, then ye shall offer up an heave-offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe. And this your heave-offering shall be reckoned unto you as though it were the corn of the threshing-floor, and as the fulness of the wine-press." The Levites had not an inheritance of land, like their brethren of the other tribes; they were divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel; they could not therefore offer unto God a tenth of the produce of such land as the other tribes did; but he appoints that they shall offer a tenth of the tithes which they receive, and that this shall be (גִּזְשָׁב, imputed, the same word that is used respecting the imputation of Abraham's faith for righteousness) reckoned to them for the tenth of the produce of so much land. Here we find God imputing to the Levites one thing which is done, for another which is not done. And it is exactly in the same sense that God for Christ's sake imputeth faith for righteousness.—Abraham had not performed unsinning obedience, but "he believed God;" and this which he *did*, God, by an act of grace, imputed to him for that which he had *not* done. And as he treated Abraham, so does he now treat all those who walk in the steps of his faith. By virtue of that gracious covenant into which he has entered with a guilty world, by our Lord Jesus Christ, he imputeth faith for righteousness; he puts it down to our account for an unsinning obedience; he accepteth of faith alone from a sinner, who has all his days been living in the transgression of his law, but who now falls at his feet for mercy, in the stead of a proper righteousness, perfect obedience, which would otherwise have been indispensibly necessary to his justification. Had we such a righteousness to present unto God, the imputation

of faith *for* righteousness would be unnecessary; we should stand justified before him as innocent beings, on the ground of our own spotless obedience. But who among the fallen race possesses such a righteousness? Who, invested with the garment of beauty unwrinkled, and purity unspotted, can place himself before the God of infinite righteousness, on the ground of meritorious innocence? Alas! we all have sinned! Every mouth is stopped! The whole world is become guilty before God! Behold, then, the astonishing grace of our offended Creator! God hath delivered up his beloved Son as a propitiation for the offences of sinners; and now he imputeth faith *for* righteousness to guilty man, through the propitiation of his beloved Son. Amazing mercy! God is holy, beyond all thought, all measure! man is guilty of innumerable transgressions of the divine law! yet, under the covenant of grace, this undone, wretched creature, upon his sincere believing, is treated by his offended Creator as though he were innocent.

For, first, if he were innocent, he would not be liable to the charge of guilt; but although he is justly liable to this charge, yet, upon his believing, God treats him as if he were not; he freely pardons his sins, and so delivers him from the charge. Secondly, if he were innocent, he would not be obnoxious to the penalty of sin, because he would not deserve it; so, upon his believing, God remits this penalty, though he is guilty, and *does* deserve it. Thirdly, if he had continued innocent, he would have stood in the divine favour on the ground of merit; so, though fallen, upon his "Believing with the heart unto righteousness," God again places him in his favour, on the ground of mercy. Fourthly, as perfect innocence would

have perpetuated man's moral union with God, as his glorious Creator and bounteous preserver; so, through believing, though separated from God by sin, he is again taken into union with him as his divine Redeemer, and compassionate Saviour. Fifthly, as man, if innocent, would have freedom of access to God his maker, with all the reverent boldness of a guiltless being, the perfect workmanship of his hands; so by faith, though destitute of innocence, he has freedom of access to God his Saviour, with all the humble boldness of a guilty being, who is the highly valued, though most unworthy, purchase of his own blood. Sixthly, as man, if innocent, would have retained the image of God in which he was created; so guilty as he now is, upon his believing, God saves him from his depraved dispositions "by the washing of regeneration," and begins to restore him to his holy image, "by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shedeth on" him "abundantly through Christ Jesus." Seventhly, as man, if innocent, would never have felt the pang of guilt, slavish fears, and the frown of heaven, but would have possessed a consciousness of divine peace, a delightful hope of eternal felicity, and an assurance of his Creator's smile; so, under the covenant of grace, he, though guilty, upon his believing, passes from condemnation to conscious acceptance with God; from guilty fears of death, eternity, and judgment, to blooming hopes of life and immortality; and from the frown of God, too justly offended, to the light of his countenance, now freely reconciled. Lastly, as man, if innocent, would have continued entitled to eternal life, including confirmed habits of holiness, exalted felicity, and a glorious immortality; so upon believing, God

freely restores this title, which was lost through sin; so that, "being justified by his grace, we are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith." For who does not discover, that to impute faith for righteousness, to justify sinners by faith alone, is an act of mere mercy, sovereign, unmerited grace. To what, but this, are we indebted for such an imputation? To the meritorious virtue of faith? What, mere faith in the mercy of a God, whose wrath we deserve, merit the plenary pardon of all our past offences; merit to be treated as if we had never offended at all! Faith herself never fails to renounce the smallest share in the glory; never fails to lay the whole honour at the feet of him whose mercy ordained such an economy. Her language ever is, and of necessity ever must be, "We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And how immensely are we indebted to this grace for a method of justification so suitable to creatures possessing a nature like ours, and involved in such circumstances! Creatures who possess a nature which is rational and immortal; and therefore accountable, and capable of everlasting good or evil! Creatures who have violated the holy laws of God; and thus have trampled on his high authority, and rebelled against his awful throne! Creatures, who are therefore become obnoxious to his just displeasure; subject to his righteous curse; and liable to that never-ending evil which his displeasure alone can inflict, and to which the curse of his violated law hath expressly doomed us! We again repeat, (and hope, in language more worthy of the exalted theme, to repeat it for ever,) how immensely are

we indebted to the unmerited mercy of God in Christ Jesus, for a method of justification so suitable to creatures possessing a rational, an immortal nature; accountable, and capable of either eternal happiness or misery; but involved in sin, subject to the divine curse, and exposed to endless perdition!—A method which at once reverses our condition; absolves our guilt, removes our curse, and plucks us from the very verge of hell, as brands out of the burning!—A method which equally secures all the honour of a free act of grace unto God, and all the privileges of a plenary pardon to him that believeth.

That a doctrine like this should be liable to many objections, cannot, however, be matter of surprise, when we reflect, first, that, considered in itself merely, it stands opposed to all our notions of the righteous moral government of God; secondly, that if not considered in itself merely, but in its connexion with the whole plan of our redemption by Christ, it involves in itself all the difficulties which men have raised against the several doctrines contained in this divine plan; and, thirdly, that many passages of scripture, which speak of justification by Christ, and other passages which appear to ascribe it to good works, may easily be construed into objections against justification by faith. But whether these considerations will account for the fact or not, such objections are made. None of them, however, are insuperable; for, indeed, it would be a very serious circumstance, if even one insuperable objection could be produced against a doctrine so important as the revealed method of our justification. Examination will prove that all objections against it are plants which are not of our heavenly Father's planting, and as such he will

pluck them up. To this examination we must devote several of the following sections, in which a variety of matter will come before us, the whole of which, it is hoped, will serve at once to confirm this grand Christian doctrine, and to illustrate several others which are closely connected with it.

SECTION V.

An examination of the scheme of justification proposed by Dr. MACKNIGHT, which in a singular point of view stands opposed to the doctrine of the last section.

THE scheme proposed by this learned and celebrated commentator,* is so far from allowing justification to be conferred, or righteousness to be imputed, immediately upon believing, that it refers the matter wholly to the last judgment; affirming, that it is then only that God will forgive the sins of believers, justify them, or impute faith unto them for righteousness. In support of this strange notion, our author, as might be expected, advances several strange arguments, which, however, ought not to pass unnoticed; especially as they proceed from a writer who is now much consulted, and, indeed, deserves to be, by every one.

His first argument to prove that believers are not justified till the last judgment, is taken (to use his own words) from the nature of justification. "To

* Essay VI. Sect. 5, of his Translation, Paraphrase, and Notes.

be *justified*, in the scripture sense of the word, is, to be acquitted from the charge of having broken the law of God, either by omitting the duties which it enjoins, or by committing the sins which it forbids; consequently, it means, to be freed by the sentence of God, from the punishment which they incur who break his law."

But if this account of justification be literally accurate, it will prove, not only that believers cannot be justified *till* the last judgment, but that they certainly cannot be justified even then. Can any man at the last judgment be acquitted from the charge of having omitted duties which the law of God enjoins? Have not all been guilty of such omissions? Or can any man hope to be acquitted from the charge of having committed sins which the law of God forbids? For this law forbids all sins; and who is he that has committed none? As that great divine, Mr. BAXTER, somewhere says, man will never be justified from this charge, *Thou art a sinner*. If, however, our author means, our being acquitted from the charge of having broke the law of God, by the forgiveness of our transgressions, and he expresses his meaning in this strange manner, only for the sake of founding an argument upon it, we will not object to his meaning, but as for his argument it has no foundation but in his words; nor in them neither, unless he means to prove, that man can never be justified at all.

"My second argument," says the Doctor, "to prove that men are not justified in the present life, shall be taken from experience; and it is this: since justification is an act of God's free grace, in which he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous, if believers are pardoned in this life,

they must in this life be delivered from the punishment of sin, that is, from diseases and death, and every evil which at the fall was inflicted on mankind as a punishment of Adam's sin. The reason is, a pardon which leaves the sinner under any part of his punishment, is no pardon at all: at least it is not a full pardon."

One consideration, which is suggested even in the argument itself, is sufficient to show, that this reasoning proves nothing at all; except, indeed, that a strong mind can reason sometimes very weakly. "The punishment of sin, that is, diseases and death, and every evil which at the fall was inflicted on mankind," our author informs us, were inflicted, "as the punishment of Adam's sin." How then does it follow, that the pardon of our own personal transgressions in this life must free us from these evils?—Evils which these transgressions did not produce? And if pardon of sins in the present life immediately saves a man from the consequences of his sins; from the displeasure of God, the curse of his law, liability to perdition, besides all the internal effects of conscious guilt, is it "no pardon at all" because it does not also immediately save him from the evils which were brought upon mankind by the sin of Adam? And if, in addition to all this, the evils thus brought upon mankind, are, through the grace of God, sanctified to the believer, and turned into great blessings; and if, after they have answered many wise and blessed purposes, he is entitled through pardon of sin to an everlasting freedom from, and reward of them, is this "no pardon at all?" Our author did well to soften this a little, by adding, "at least not a full pardon." It will, however, be found as full as the scriptures any-where represent justification by faith

as being; and, therefore, a man may be justified, in the sense of the holy scriptures, and yet continue to suffer all that believers do suffer in the present state.

“ A third argument, to show that believers are not justified in the present life, arises from those passages of scripture in which justification is represented as a thing future. Of these the principal are, Rom. ii. 5.—‘ Revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every one according to his works.’ Rom. viii. 24.—‘ We are saved by hope.’ Now hope seen, is not hope; for what a man seeth, how also can he hope for it? 25, ‘ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with patience for it.’ Gal. v. 5.—‘ We, through the Spirit, look for the hope of righteousness by faith.’ ”

The first of these passages certainly represents the last judgment as a thing future. But what is there in it about remission of sins? What is it that God will then render to believers? To support our author’s scheme, the passage ought to run thus: “ To them that believe, he will then render remission of sins.” Instead of this, it is, “ To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, he will render eternal life.” The second passage also represents the object of hope as being future, and proves that it must necessarily be so. But what is that object, the hope of which saved the apostle and his brethren; that is, saved them from discouragement and apostacy? The verse before informs us it is “ the redemption of the body” to a glorious immortality, not the remission of sins. The last of these passages will by no means yield the inference our author draws from it, namely, that righteousness is not

imputed in the present life, unless it could be proved, first, that the "hope of righteousness" signifies justification; and secondly, that we are not to look for this in the present life. The term (*δικαιοσύνη*) *righteousness*, in the writings of this apostle, *itself alone* signifies justification. And, therefore, the *hope* of righteousness may naturally be supposed to denote something more, which belongs to justification.—And why not future glory, called *hope* because it is the 'grand object of this grace; and "the hope of righteousness," because it belongs to justification as its grand final issue. But should it be insisted that the whole clause denotes nothing but justification itself, we then demand, why is this not to be looked for in the present life? Or who can prove that the passage means, we look for remission of sins in the life to come? Both these points must be gained before the inference drawn from the passage can be admitted, and neither of them can be, while right reasoning continues to be the track which leads to truth.

"A fourth argument is, if believers on their first act of faith are justified, that is, judged in the present life, and acquitted from the guilt of all sins they have till then committed, they must be judged twice; contrary to the declaration of scripture, in which one judgment only of the righteous, as well as of the wicked, is spoken of: and that one judgment is foretold to happen at Christ's second coming."

It may be allowed, that forgiveness of sins is an act of God considered in the character of a judge; and that the term *justification*, which is forensic, suggests this idea; that consequently, justification may be called, a judging of the believer. But this is not the only act which God performeth as a

judge, with respect to men, in the present life. For all the acts of his moral government, whether in conferring blessings, or inflicting judgments, are represented as proceeding from his throne as a sovereign judge; and he is, in these acts, constantly said to judge men and nations. If, therefore, by judging we understand an act of God as a moral governor, he not only judges men twice, but times innumerable; and this is far from being contrary to the scriptures; they are full of it. But our author's argument proceeds on the supposition, that remission of sins is an act of judgment, exactly the same as that which God will perform at the last day. This, however, is plainly taking for granted what the argument ought to prove. The scriptures no-where represent remission of sins in any such light, but afford as strong distinctions between justification by faith, and the final sentence of God respecting the righteous, as can well be imagined. And if God in this life imputeth faith for righteousness, and in this sense judge the believer, and constitute him an heir of glory; and if at the last day he rewards him according to his works proceeding from faith, by actually conferring this glory upon him, and in this proper sense judge him again, what is there in this that is inconsistent with the declaration of scripture, in which one final judgment only is spoken of, seeing remission of sins in this life is not that final judgment. But if a man will give the same name to two distinct things, and then argue against one of them on the ground on which he himself has been pleased to place it, what can be expected, but that justification in this life shall be called a judging of men, and because the final sentence is a judging of men also, they must both be made to mean the same

thing, in order that it may be proved, that there is no justification in this life, because then believers would be judged twice.

Such are the arguments by which no less a person than Dr. MACKNIGHT hoped to make it evident, as he expresses it, that the inspired writers taught no such doctrine as justification in the present life. His arguments, however, if they are a fair specimen of what can be said on the subject, do certainly prove that no such thing as he proposes can be made evident. And it is hoped, the following considerations will serve to confirm what he calls the generally received opinion; that justification by the imputation of faith for righteousness is to be attained in the present life, and cannot be at all at the last judgment.

First, that every scripture that relates to remission of sins, justification by faith, or the imputation of faith for righteousness, speaks of it as the present privilege of believers. As "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins;"* "By him all that believe are justified from all things;"† "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." These are a mere specimen of the whole language of holy writ on this subject. Dr. MACKNIGHT acknowledges, indeed, that the scriptures represent justification as taking place in this life, and endeavours to prove, that this is only a form of speech which shows the certainty that it will take place. He quotes several passages in which future things are represented as already existing; to prove that justification, although represented as existing now,

* Col. i. 14.

† Acts xiii. 39.

yet does not, but is a thing future. The instances he quotes, however, respect things which it is impossible should be imagined to exist already; and therefore this mode of expression could not lead to any mistake respecting the time of their existence. But this is far from being the case with respect to remission of sins; for, according to our author, its attainment in the present life is the commonly received opinion, and therefore this mode of expression respecting it could not fail to lead to a mistake respecting the time of its attainment, if that time were not the present life, but the future judgment. Besides, the passages quoted by our author are accompanied by many others in the scriptures on the same subjects, which speak of the same things as being future; but this is not the case with respect to the scriptures on the subject before us. There is not one passage in all the Bible which represents remission of sins as a privilege which believers are to receive at the day of judgment: they all with one unvarying voice proclaim it as the immediate, the present privilege of all that truly believe.

Secondly, *facts* demonstrate what the *doctrine* of holy writ constantly affirms on this subject. The psalmist, David, calls upon all that is within him to bless the holy name of God, because he forgave him all his iniquities. St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, puts them in mind, that God for Christ's sake had forgiven them; * and founds upon it the duty of forgiving one another: a poor foundation enough, if God had not forgiven them, but only promised to give it at the day of judgment. St. John represents justification as the pri-

* Eph. iv. 32.

vilege of even the youngest, or the least perfect class of true Christians: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven."* "Son, be of good cheer," said our blessed Lord to a Paralytic, "thy sins are forgiven thee." The Scribes accuse him of blasphemy for this; he replies, "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins. Then saith he to the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed, and go to thy house." Very much like this is the case of the "woman which was a sinner." She stood weeping behind our blessed Redeemer; and, bowing down to his feet, began to pour out upon them a flood of tears, wiping them with the hair of her head, and anointing them with precious ointment. The Pharisee, whose guest our Lord was, murmured that he suffered a woman, who was a sinner, to touch him. But Jesus, after delivering a striking parable on the subject, and giving an appropriate address to him, respecting the penitent who continued weeping at his feet, said to him, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." Then he said to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven." And again afterward, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." The parable which our Lord spoke on this occasion, of the creditor, who had two debtors, and who, when they had nothing to pay, frankly forgave them both, is a certain proof that he did not mean to illustrate the nature of a promise of pardon, but a real act of forgiveness. And when our Lord applied this parable to the case of this woman, how would the Pharisee understand it; how would the woman understand it; how, in a word, did they that sat at meat with him

* 1 John ii. 12.

actually understand it? That it was a proper act of forgiveness, like that of the creditor to his two debtors: "They began to say within themselves, who is this that forgiveth sins also?"

A third argument which proves that justification or remission of sins is attainable in the present life, and is not attainable at the day of judgment, is, that no account which we have of it in the scriptures represents the circumstances of the last judgment as attending it, and that no account we have of the last judgment represents forgiveness of sins as being a part of the transaction of that awful period. And is it not strange, if justification by faith is indeed the work of the last judgment, that, on the one hand, the circumstances of that day should never attend the scripture account of it; and, on the other hand, it should never be represented as a work to be then performed. What can these two circumstances teach, but plainly these two truths, that remission of sins is an act of God, graciously performed in behalf of believers in the present life; but that it is a work which will not be performed at all in the day when he will judge the world. There will be no blotting out of sins then; but men will be judged "according to things which are found written in the books!"

Fourthly, our author's scheme is full of manifest contradictions; for he allows that believers are in this life sanctified, that they are children of God, that they enjoy the favour of God, peace with God, and delightful intercourse with him. But is it not a contradiction that a man should be sanctified and holy, and yet not justified?—Be a child of God by adoption, and yet unforgiven his iniquities?—Enjoy the divine favour, and yet God has not pardoned his offences against him?—Have in-

ward peace, and yet not have God's gracious pardon?—And enjoy delightful intercourse with him, and all the privileges of justification, of which the present state is capable, and yet not be justified.

Lastly, if believers are not justified till the day of judgment, and, according to the scriptures and our author, there is a state of glorious happiness with Christ between death and judgment, it will follow that men may depart and be with Christ in glorious happiness, where they rest from their labours and their works follow them, without justification, without pardon of sin. In a word, the scriptures would furnish arguments almost innumerable against this absurd doctrine. And we cannot forbear lamenting that learned men, and more especially great commentators, should weaken the authority of the most important Christian doctrines, by advancing principles which common sense itself never would advance. For although such principles are easily exposed and refuted by persons who are conversant with such subjects; yet into how many minds they may cast the seeds of dangerous error, is not easy to tell. What must be the consequence of our author's discussion on the subject before us, falling into the hands of unenlightened readers? Why first, that all those evidences of justification by faith, or remission of sins, which believers in the very language of scripture profess to enjoy, are mere fictions. And then, secondly, that to seek remission of sins in this life is the greatest folly imaginable, seeing it is not attainable. Every man certainly has a right to examine and judge for himself, and to propose the result of all to mankind; but surely it is necessary that an author, especially an author of celebrity, should act with profound caution in advancing and en-

deavouring to support by argument, schemes of doctrine relative to men's eternal salvation, which are contrary to Christian principles, as commonly received, and confessedly contrary to the *letter* of holy writ. Such things, however, must be expected; and one good end, at least, is accomplished by them; they afford an opportunity, by refuting them, to establish the more firmly the truth as it is in Jesus. Such will be the effect of a due investigation of the scheme which is the subject of this section; it will produce a deeper conviction, probably, than we even had before, that justification by faith is not at all the work of the last judgment, but must either be sought and attained in the present life, or never to all eternity.

SECTION VI.

The grand objection to justification by faith, founded on its being injurious to the interests of morality, examined and answered.

To be zealous for good works, is undoubtedly an essential trait in the character of every pious man. But if our zeal for them be pure and heavenly, it will not lead us to adopt, without examination, any objections against a doctrine which has the least appearance of being an article of divine revelation, though that doctrine may be represented as being inimical to good works. For pure zeal has respect to good works chiefly as they are agreeable to the will of God, and subservient to his glory

among men; and because the truths which God has been pleased to reveal, are undoubtedly agreeable to his will and subservient to his glory, it will have a high respect unto them also: the more so, as these truths are the chief instruments which the spirit of God employs in producing good in the minds of men, and good works in their lives. To be zealous for the one, then, at the expense of the other, cannot be genuine zeal; nor to be zealous for the one, and indifferent with respect to the other. To say, or think, "It matters not what a man believes, let him only act rightly," is the false, the impious zeal of the present age. What is it, but to say, (pushing the principle forward to its issue,) "It matters not, if a man act rightly, whether he believes the word of God, or even in his existence or not." So right-acting deists and atheists, by this blasphemous indifference to the truths of religion, are to be put at once upon a level with obedient believers. Let us be zealous for good works; but let us also be equally zealous for divine truth.

It is strongly objected to the doctrine of justification by faith, that it is injurious to the interests of morality; that it encourages people to expect salvation without holiness. And it is true enough, that the doctrine may be abused so as to operate most prejudicially against the whole system of morality and piety. But ought it to be rejected because it is liable to such abuses? On the same ground we may reject the doctrine of repentance as leading to pardon. Is not this doctrine every day abused by millions, who defer the whole business of salvation, by trusting to the promised repentance of some future period; perhaps that of a dying hour? On the same ground we may reject the doctrine of divine influence, our Lord's medi-

ation, and the mercy of God itself. For each of these is liable to abuses; and it is certain, that all the doctrines of grace, so far as they encourage sinful man to expect salvation in a right way, are very liable to be abused by all those who wish to attain salvation in a wrong way; to sin on, and yet be saved at last. That the doctrine of justification by faith, which is one of the chief of these doctrines, should be liable to such an abuse, cannot, therefore, be a just objection against it. The apostle evidently saw it would be so; and he himself makes the objections which he knew would rise in the minds of his readers, and answers them in a way which secures the interests of practical piety, without at all weakening his doctrine of justification by faith. After all, his doctrine was abused; and it is highly probable that St. Peter alludes to his discussions on this subject, when he informs us, that there were some things in his writings which ignorant and unsteady persons wrested to their own destruction. Shall we then reject this doctrine? No, but by vindicating it from the charge which is unjustly brought against it, contend earnestly for this part of "the faith once delivered to the saints." This will require nothing but attention to the scripture account of that faith which justifies and saves. For it is certain, if we should teach that a bare belief of truth, will be accounted for righteousness, we should most grievously err; and the doctrine would be justly chargeable with having a licentious tendency. But this is far from being the account of faith, as it is given in the scriptures. Let us carefully attend to this important point.

And first, "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" never fails to be accompanied by *repentance*,

(*Μετανοία*, literally, *a change of mind*) towards God. Hence repentance and faith are perpetually linked together, in the ministry of the baptist, and our blessed Lord, in the commission which he gave to the seventy disciples, and afterward to his apostles; and in the execution of their commission. Hence again, in all the examples we have of justification by faith, repentance manifestly attends, and is an essential trait in their faith. What a change of mind accompanies the faith of Zaccheus, to whose house salvation came that very day,—the faith of the woman that was a sinner, whose sins were forgiven, whose faith saved her on her first application to Christ; she came to him weeping, and departed in peace,—the faith of the dying thief, who accused himself, vindicated the expiring Saviour, and implored salvation at those hands, which were nailed to the cross in order to procure it,—the faith of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, Saul of Tarsus, the jailor at Philippi, and many more. That faith, therefore, which is unaccompanied by this repentance, this *change of mind towards God*, is not the justifying faith of the gospel. But if it be thus accompanied, if a sinner, conscious of his guilt and danger, with his whole heart turning from sin towards God, believe the good tidings of salvation by Jesus Christ, is there any thing injurious to the interests of morality, in the doctrine which teaches, that God imputeth such faith as this for righteousness, justifies such a repenting believer by an act of grace, freely pardoneth all his past offences? What can possibly be a stronger inducement to such repentance, such a blessed alteration of mind, than the immediate prospect of a free, plenary pardon? And what can more effectually cut off the vain hopes

of mere speculatists in religion, than to be taught that all their opinions, how just soever, are not true faith, and will never avail to justification, while they continue destitute of such repentance?

Secondly, humiliation of the soul on account of sin is essential to true faith, as we find it represented in the sacred oracles. The Pharisee described by our Lord abounded in his own kind of faith, as well as works; but humiliation of Spirit is wanting, and he quits the hallowed place of the Most High, applauding himself, but condemned of God. The publican has faith in the divine mercy alone, being deeply humbled by his own sinfulness before the infinite majesty of divine holiness. His feet, which had trod the path of ruin, stand just within the precincts of the sacred place, perhaps the outer court; but, through self-abasing shame, he refuses to draw near to God's holy temple, which had been the residence of the divine glory. His eyes, which had looked with idolatrous regard on the mammon of unrighteousness, or on other objects beneath the chief good, he will not so much as lift up towards heaven, ashamed to meet *the purer eyes of God*. His hands smite upon his bosom, which he feels is the habitation of depravity and guilt. His lips, in accents of deep contrition, pray and confess; while his heart, pierced with penitential sorrow, finds no resource but the mercy of God. To this he flies; for this he pleads; in this alone he confides; nor confides in vain; he goes down to his house justified; * he abases himself, and God exalteth him. And is justification, by faith like this, injurious to the interests of morality? Does it not strike a

* Luke xviii. 9—14.

deadly blow at the very root of all impiety,—the three-fold, the entwisted root of unhumbléd pride, unrelenting hardness of heart, and the most specious, the most refined, the most dangerous unbelief. Let the worst of men that ever trampled on all authority, human and divine; or, on the other hand, the most refined, self-applauding moralist that ever trod the path of pharisaic righteousness, begin to implore salvation by faith in divine mercy alone, as this publican did; the one, from being desperately wicked, will instantly become a surprising monument of the saving power of grace; the other, like converted Saul of Tarsus, an humble, ardent disciple of Jesus, renouncing every boast, excepting the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord; and both of them will present a striking demonstration, how admirably the doctrine of faith, viewed in a scriptural light, is calculated to promote and secure the interests of genuine morality. For no man's faith, if unaccompanied by humiliation of Spirit, is the faith of the gospel, whether he be a self-applauding moralist, believing *some things* and performing *many*, or a speculative religionist, believing *many things*, and performing *but few*. But if a man, of what character soever, feeling, confessing, and bewailing his sins, implore forgiveness, trusting in the unmerited mercy of God, as now displayed in Christ Jesus; who, that ever knew by his own experience what this is, can imagine that the imputation of such faith for righteousness, is subversive of practical piety. No, though it should even be his *first* application to his offended Maker, as appears to have been the case with this publican; though it should be like his, a short application, as well as the first; yet if as genuine, our going down to our house justified as he did, exulting in the mercy of God, will yield

us conscious evidence, that this method of salvation (though sudden enough to disgust scholars and philosophers, who come at learning and morals by so slow a progress) is divine and durable in its moral effect on our whole temper and deportment.

Thirdly, true faith “worketh by love.”*—Love to God, a supreme delight in him,—love to God’s truth, a high estimation of it, and glowing zeal for it,—love to holiness, unfeigned admiration of it, as existing ineffably in God, and by communication, in angels and saints,—love therefore to the people of God, complacency in them on account of their union with Christ, and their likeness to him,—love to sinners, even our enemies; deep, tender concern for their welfare, bowels of pity towards them, and burning desire for their salvation. Such love, however, does not so properly accompany faith as flow from it; but no sooner does exist, than this divine light proceeding from it, fills and irradiates the whole soul, and becomes a co-operator together with its cause, in producing every thing that is pleasing to God, and subservient to the good of men. Such then is the faith which God counteth for righteousness; nor does any man possess true faith, who is destitute of this its grand co-operating principle. But if a wretched sinner, turning towards God from sin and vain creatures, deeply humbled under a sense of his unworthiness, heartily embrace the declaration of mercy made to him by the gospel, through the bleeding love of the eternal Word made flesh; and so embracing it, is in a moment filled with love to God and his truth, to holiness and all holy beings, to miserable sinners, and even to his worst enemies, will it be in-

* Gal. v. 6.

jurious to the interests of morality to teach, that God imputeth such faith for righteousness? No, the very soul of all true morality is secured by the doctrine of faith.

“Talk they of morals? O thou bleeding love!

Thou maker of new morals to mankind!

The grand morality is love of thee.”*

And it is faith that enkindles this love of Christ, and causes it to glow and burn in the bosom of a believer, with an ardour which its grand object, though invisible to mortal eyes, far more than deserves. “Whom having not seen,” says St. Peter to true believers, “ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet BELIEVING, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”† Nor will any thing less than believing in this manner, and to this effect, be found available to salvation, under the Christian dispensation; “For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.”‡

Again, fourthly, the faith of the gospel is productive of internal purity. For thus we read, that God purified the hearts of the primitive Christians by faith.|| And it is most certain, that our *belief of the truth*, unless instrumental of *the sanctification of the Spirit*, is not true faith, and will never lead us to salvation: for if it lead not to holiness, how can it lead to heaven. But if our faith be answerable to the definition given in the fourth section, it must of necessity tend to the purification of the soul from every sinful temper, earthly affection, and low, selfish motive. And this we shall discover, if we duly consider the na-

* Young, Night the IV.

† 1 Peter i. 8.

‡ Gal. v. 6.

|| Acts xv. 9.

ture of faith; the full, unwavering, undivided assent of the soul to divine truth: its *object*—the truth of God itself, which is holy; or the grand object which his truth presenteth, a holy Saviour from sin: its *cause*—the operation of the holy Spirit, every one of whose operations is designed and calculated to produce holiness; and its *attending dispositions*, all of which stand directly opposed to sin. And, indeed, if true Christian faith worketh by love, it cannot do otherwise than purify the heart from all those evils which are contrary to love, exactly in that degree that it is exercised, in *that* degree that “God fulfillesh in us all the good pleasure of his goodness, even the work of faith with power.”

Once more, so far is the doctrine of justification by faith from operating injuriously to the cause of morality, that the faith by which God justifies, never fails to be productive of morality the most exalted. St. James strongly distinguishes between that faith which consisteth in mere opinion, and that which is a holy, operative principle in the heart, producing obedience to God in the life. The one he terms a dead faith, the faith of devils; the other alone is true Christian faith; like that of Abraham, who, by his faith in God, was led to the most exemplary act of obedience that ever mere mortal performed. Excepting “the second Adam, which is the Lord from heaven,” and the first Adam in his innocence, together with his innocent consort, a true believer is the most refined moralist that ever earth presented to the eye of heaven. Read with attention the whole account of a Christian believer as given by St. John. “Who-soever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, **IS BORN OF GOD**; and every one that **LOVETH** him that

begat, LOVETH him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments ARE NOT GRIEVOUS. For whatsoever is born of God, OVERCOMETH THE WORLD: and this is the VICTORY that overcometh the world, even OUR FAITH. Who is he that overcometh the world, but HE THAT BELIEVETH THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD?"* How evident is it from this whole passage, that by believing in Christ, believing "that Jesus is the Christ," and believing "that Jesus is the Son of God," the scriptures, when they speak of salvation by faith, do not mean a merely speculative crediting of these truths, but a full assent of the mind to them, with an eye to salvation by Christ; and all this under the saving influence of the Spirit of God. For it is a certain fact, that thousands who have speculatively believed that Jesus is the Christ, never were divinely regenerated, never "born of God," as the apostle affirms every one is, who, in *his* sense, believeth this; and that *tens of thousands* in the present day speculatively believe "that Jesus is the Son of God," who yet do not overcome the world, as our apostle affirms respecting *his* believer, but are complete vassals to the whole spirit and practice of the world, notwithstanding all their dead faith, their mere opinions. Such was the faith of Simon; "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter," said the apostle, "for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." And so far was his faith from overcoming the world, that he still continued himself a wretched slave to sin, "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of ini-

* 1 John v. 1—5.

quity. Besides, when our apostle, in the same passage, defines a little more particularly what he means by believing; we find the most satisfactory evidence that it is very superior in its nature to a bare crediting of any truth whatsoever. "He that hath the Son," (the same thing as believing in the Son, in the verses preceding,) "hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE THAT WE HAVE IN HIM, THAT IF WE ASK ANY THING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL HE HEARETH US. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE PETITIONS THAT WE DESIRED OF HIM." Review the whole of this account of one, that, in the apostolic sense, believeth in Christ. First, he is born of God; as our Lord expresses it, he is "born again, born from above," born of the Spirit. Secondly, being born of God, he loveth God, as his heavenly father, from whom he has received, not only his natural existence, but his new, spiritual, heavenly being. Thirdly, as he loveth, with supreme complacency, him that begat, considered as his heavenly Father, so he now loveth, with affection and delight, them that are begotten of him, all the children of God, considered as his Christian brethren. Fourthly, thus loving God, he keepeth his commandments; and because his obedience flows from love, the commandments of God are not grievous, but delightful to him. Lastly, his faith is victorious; whatsoever opposeth him in his spiritual course, "Whether tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword," he that

believeth overcometh. "Nay," says another apostle, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

If then, with the scriptures, we insist on faith founded in repentance, accompanied with humiliation, working by love, purifying the heart, and producing universal piety in the life; *faith*, which whosoever possesseth, is born of God, loveth God, and all the children of God, cheerfully keepeth his commandments, and victoriously overcometh the world;—and if we affirm with the scriptures, that God imputeth such faith for righteousness, will the interests of morality be injured? It is true, if men give an unscriptural account of faith, and then teach that it is such faith that justifies and saves, great, very great harm may be done to the whole cause of religion; or if no account be given of it, or but a very imperfect one. And this places in a strong light the necessity of treating largely of the nature and various effects of justifying faith, and of confining ourselves to the plain account which is given of it in the holy scriptures. But if some do injudiciously, and others unscripturally, teach the doctrine of salvation by faith, are we therefore to find fault with the doctrine itself, as it stands in all its purity on the sacred page? We cannot view it as it stands there, and then accuse it of licentiousness; it is altogether holy in its whole tendency. It is impossible for a man even to seek justification in this way, without at once renouncing his sins and every vain pursuit. What then may be expected when he attains this grand benefit of the gospel, and lives in the humble exercise of one of its cardinal graces? He will form a striking proof, that this doctrine is the most powerful of instruments in the hand of divine

grace, for the renovation of the human heart, and the complete regulation of human life.

This is not speculation; not an account of faith which has no existence but in theory. It stands fair and clear upon the sacred page; and it is experimentally transcribed from thence into the hearts of thousands of living characters. Thousands of blessed men and women happily realize this wholesome doctrine. We can produce multitudes, who by seeking remission of sins in this way, have not only found access into the grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, but have given full proof, in their whole future life, that faith leads to holiness. By this method of justification, we have abundance of actual proof, that mere moralists have become evangelical in their obedience; dull formalists have become spiritual, heavenly, and ardent in their devotions; and the very worst of mankind, to the astonishment of all who knew them, have suddenly been changed into the best of men, and have continued such.*

* Where there is opportunity for performing good works, faith never fails to perform them. Upon this ground, Dr. SAMUEL CHANDLER very pertinently observes, " Faith in a Christian is the *principle* of action; and unblamable *morals* are the proper *fruits* and *evidences* of it. *Faith* brings us into a *justified state*, but it is *living* by faith, or practising all those virtues of a good life which God hath commanded, that *preserves* us in the *grace wherein we stand*. Faith furnishes the grand motives to morality; morality discovers the life, and is a noble evidence of the power and efficacy of faith. Where faith is genuine, morality is its constant companion; and morality wants its noblest character and recommendation that doth not spring from faith. Both are in their place necessary, indispensibly necessary, and equally so; faith as the root, morals as the branches; faith as the spring and source, morals as the streams that flow from it. Salvation is of faith, as it is the inward principle of a divine life;

Fear not then, ye advocates for morality, lest this grand article of the Christian faith should be subversive of Christian practice: it promotes, it secures it. Thousands who once "walked according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind," but who now are walking in holiness before both God and men,—who once were a dishonour to human nature itself, but are now ornaments both to civil society and the cause of religion, can declare with meekness, to any that ask them a reason of the hope that is in them, that the doctrine of justification by faith was the truth by which this blessed change was effected. The propagating of the doctrines of mere morality, being ill suited to human depravity, and still worse to human guilt, leaves men just as bad as it finds them; so that liars still lie, swearers still swear, sabbath-breakers still profane the sacred day, drunkards still live in drunkenness, the unjust in dishonesty, the miser in covetousness, the proud in pride, the pleasure-taker in vain pleasures, and, in a word, the sinner in his sins. Whereas the preaching of justification by faith is the grand truth which "turneth men from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God; that they

nor can there be any salvation without good morals, because where these are wanting there are no signs of a divine life, but the certain evidence that we are barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To assert the necessity of both, diminishes nothing from the dignity of either, and the representing them as inseparably connected, reserves to each its proper place and importance, and secures the honour, the interest, and usefulness of both." Sermons, Vol. I. page 57, 58. This is an excellent testimony to the reality, energy, and fruitfulness of faith; and confirmed by the experience and practice of all genuine Christians. EDITOR.

may receive remission of their sins, and an inheritance among them that are **SANCTIFIED BY FAITH** that is in Jesus." And being thus converted from the darkness of depraved nature, to the light of heavenly grace; and from the wretched drudgery of satan, to the delightful service of God, they do actually receive the remission of their sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith. By the blessed experience of the first of these grand benefits, they become happy witnesses of the eleventh article of our national church: "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort." And as by receiving remission of sins, these characters become witnesses of the eleventh article, so, by "receiving an inheritance among them that are sanctified **BY FAITH**," they confirm the truth of the twelfth: "Albeit that good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are pleasing and acceptable to God, and do **SPRING OUT NECESSARILY OF A TRUE AND LIVELY FAITH**, insomuch that by them a **LIVELY FAITH** may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit."*

* The definition of faith given by the Rev. Mr. Fletcher runs thus: "What is *faith*? It is *believing* heartily.—What is *saving faith*? I dare not say, that it is 'only believing, confidently, my sins are forgiven me for Christ's sake,' for, if I live in sin, that belief is a *destructive* conceit, and not saving faith. Neither dare I say, that 'saving faith is only a sure trust and confidence, that Christ loved me, and gave himself for me: for if I did, I should damn almost all mankind for 4000 years.'

And, secondly, ye worthy advocates for the mediatorial glory of the Redeemer, let not your pious spirit be troubled by an apprehension, that faith imputed for righteousness will detract from that glory. It secures, it defends it, against the attempts of every hand, which would violate it with the untempered mortar of justification by works. Yea, it even adds lustre to it, exhibiting it in its native, its divine splendour! Attend to the following considerations:

First, when faith is said to be *imputed* or *counted* for righteousness, the very expression implies that it is not a proper righteousness. For were faith a proper righteousness in itself, there could be no necessity for its being *counted* or *reckoned* for righteousness; it would be absurd language, a contradiction in terms: it would be as absurd as to talk of imputing a man's honesty to him for honesty. Believing does not therefore justify as a meritorious act, as unsinning obedience would have done. The imputation of it for righteousness, is, indeed, a certain proof that we are utterly destitute of justifying merit, and that we are wholly indebted to the gracious economy of God both for pardon of sin and eternal life. It is undeserved grace alone which freely exerts itself towards guilty man, through the merits of Christ, in imputing that faith to us for righteousness, which possesses not the smallest meritorious claim to such imputation.

Secondly, the faith which God imputeth for

“To avoid putting on the black mark of damnation upon any man, that in any nation fears God and works righteousness, I would chuse say, that saving faith is *believing* the saving truth *with the heart* unto internal, and (as we have opportunity) *unto* external righteousness, according to our light and dispensation.”
Essay on Truth, Sect. I.

righteousness, could have no existence, were it not for the mediation of Christ; for it is in this that the gospel requires us to believe. This doctrine, therefore, supposes his mediation, and has such a dependance upon it, that it could have no existence without it.

Again; could faith exist in the highest degree imaginable, yet would it be utterly unavailable, were it not for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It thence derives its virtue; it is there faith hangs up all her laurels. It is through the cross that God can be just, as a moral governor, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Faith stands not related to justification, either as a proper righteousness, or as an atonement; proper righteousness we have none, and an atonement we cannot make. But an atonement is made, and through it God counteth faith for righteousness to every one that scripturally believeth.

Once more; although believing is a proper act of the mind, yet, rightly understood, it is an act which we should be eternally unable to perform, were it not for the operation of the Spirit of God in our hearts. And this operation, this divine influence, is one of the precious fruits of the death and intercession of Christ. So that we are indebted to God our Saviour for the grace by which we believe, as well as for the imputation of our believing for righteousness.

Here then is a method of justification, which brings down to the dust all the vain glory of man, nor suffers it to utter one boasting accent before the Lord. The great apostle was full of this, when he exclaimed with such peculiar energy of expression, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith." And with him we may add, "Do we

then make void the law through faith? God forbid : yea, we establish the law."

So exactly does this doctrine agree with the doctrine of holiness, and with the mediatorial glory of the Lord Jesus. It is founded in the latter ; it directly and effectually leads to the former. How then can it be thought injurious to the cause of practical religion, or derogatory to the honour of the Mediator. View the subject as it stands in the word of God, and it will be found equally to support and advance both. It strips vain man of all the showy garments of his own imagined merit ; but it adorns him, at the same time, with the lovely vesture of genuine piety : and above all, tearing the wreath of human pride from every brow, and placing the crown of glory on the head of Jesus, it ascribes salvation to him alone.

SECTION VII.

An examination of several passages of scripture, which seem to stand opposed to the doctrine of faith being imputed for righteousness, by teaching the contrary doctrine of justification by works.

It may be necessary to remark before we proceed, that when we insist, that faith, and not works, is the method of justification which God hath appointed, we mean not, that a sinner may continue to neglect what God hath required, and yet obtain forgiveness of sin, by believing what God hath taught. Let it be carefully recollected, that the same holy oracles which have declared, that salva-

tion is by faith, have also described what that faith is; and have made it sufficiently evident, that it is perfectly inconsistent with the commission of any known sin, or the neglect of any known duties.

What then do we mean? precisely this, that a sinner humbled on account of his sins, and imploring forgiveness, is to attain this great benefit, not by a course of future obedience, long or short, but only by giving full credit to the promises of pardon made by the gospel through the blood of Christ. And in the moment that such penitential supplications commence, the gospel calls upon a sinner thus to believe; and in the moment that he thus believes, he is justified; God counteth his faith to him for righteousness. To put the case a little stronger; suppose such penitential sorrow to take place this moment, and such believing the next, although there is no opportunity for a course of obedience, long or short, in this case, yet will God in that moment, freely justify such a sinner; and the fruit of faith, heavenly affections, holy tempers, and every good word and work, will immediately bud, and open, and afterwards ripen to perfection. And we may add, that although in a longer course of penitential sorrow, a sinner ceases to do evil, and learns to do well, yet is not this imputed for righteousness; he is justified only by a believing acceptance of mercy through the sacrifice and intercession of Christ. This God will impute for righteousness, though it should be in the twinkling of an eye after conviction of the evil of sin; and nothing but this, though we continue in a course of self-invented righteousness ever so long.

Such, exactly, are our views of the distinction between the two doctrines just mentioned. So

certain is it too, that they cannot both be the truth of God: if the former stand, the latter must fall; if the one is supported by divine authority, the other must be destitute of such support.

There are, however, several passages in the Bible which seem to teach us, that good works are the condition of a sinner's justification. Let us carefully examine a few of the strongest of them.

“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.”

In these words, the condition of Cain's acceptance is not said to be his believing, but his doing well.

But what is meant by the acceptance of Cain? It is true, the term acceptance is sometimes the same in its import as the term justification. But it is true also, that in this passage it is capable of two other senses, either of which we shall find very agreeable to the context, and rather more so than the other. First, Cain's acceptance, or his being approved of God, as a true worshipper. Secondly, his being accepted of God, according to the right of primogeniture, as prince and priest of mankind, after Adam's decease.

We must inquire again, what is here meant by “doing well?” The phrase, considered in itself, may denote doing well in general; or, as it stands connected here, it may respect the manner of his offering up sacrifice in particular. That the latter is intended appears highly probable.

God has respect to Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and his offering he has not respect. Cain's countenance falls, and all the gloomy rage of envy seizes his heart. God expostulates with the poor wretch, “Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” If thou offerest up

thy sacrifices in the same pious manner that Abel has offered up his, shall I not have respect to thee and to thy offering, as well as to him and to his offering?

Now if Cain's "doing well" is thus to be understood, there is a passage in the epistle to the Hebrews, which will assist us in discovering what was the particular circumstance in which Abel's well doing, with respect to offering sacrifice, consisted, and which was wanting in Cain's offering; why Abel was accepted, and Cain rejected. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." There can be little doubt but that sacrifices were first instituted with reference to the great sacrifice which was afterward to be offered up, the promised seed which should undo the mischief which the serpent had done. What objection then can there be against the supposition, that Abel's faith, in presenting his sacrifice to God, looked forward through the divine promise to the great sacrifice, the great deliverer. This, however, is certain, that Abel's faith was that which rendered his offering acceptable, and that the want of faith in Cain was the reason of his rejection. The "doing well," therefore, upon which Cain's acceptance was suspended, was the offering up of his sacrifices in faith.

The words under consideration will, therefore, contain one of the three following senses: First, if thou offer up thy sacrifice by humble faith in God thy maker, and in his promise of a Saviour, shalt thou not be forgiven, accepted of God, and enjoy his favour? Or, secondly, if thou offer up thine offerings in faith, shalt thou not be accepted, approved of God as a true worshipper? Or, lastly, if thou sacrifice to me in faith, shalt thou not be

accepted as prince and priest of mankind, to rule and to minister before me in the place of Adam thy father?

Two reasons make it highly probable that this last is the true sense of the words. First, the Hebrew word (שָׂרָא) agrees better with this sense, than with either of the others; literally signifying exaltation or elevation. In the margin of our Bible, it is very fitly rendered, "Shalt thou not have the excellency." What excellency? doubtless the elevated, the exalted dignity of filling the place of Adam after his decease; the supreme dignity of prince and priest, which hitherto had been possessed by the father of mankind. Secondly, the latter clause of the verse requires this sense, "Unto thee shall be his desire, (meaning Abel's) and thou shalt rule over him."

But in which sense soever we understand the words, they are very far from opposing the doctrine of justification by faith, and as far from yielding any aid to the contrary doctrine. The offering up of sacrifice in faith was the "doing well" on which his acceptance was suspended; consequently faith, not works, was the condition of his acceptance, in what sense soever the term is to be understood.

Attend we next to the words of the prophet Micah: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

To understand this fine and impressive passage, which perhaps is not generally understood, we must read from the beginning of the chapter. The prophet calleth on the heights and the depth

of the earth to listen to the voice of Jehovah, while he expostulates with his ungrateful people, who had departed from his worship, and served other Gods. God then speaks, and demands from them, what injury he had ever done them, or in what respect he had wearied them. He puts them in remembrance of the good he had done to them, and then requires them to vindicate their conduct in departing from him, by testifying against him.

An Israelite (or the whole people personated by one) then steps forward, and insolently answers Jehovah by insinuating, that it is so difficult to please him, and that he requires so many costly sacrifices, that the people might well be weary of his service.

“Wherewith,” says he, (we conceive in a contemptuous manner) “wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? I am required to worship him; but what costly present must I bring in my hand, to render my services acceptable? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old; nay, these will not suffice to please him; it must be a sacrifice more costly still. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousand of rivers of oil? No, even these will fall short of pleasing him, he will find fault with my services still. What *shall* be done to please such a God! Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

The prophet now rises in behalf of God, and replies to these audacious insinuations: “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good,” what is pleasing and acceptable to him, why then dost thou thus impiously inquire, as though thou knewest

not what is pleasing to him, or as though it were impossible to please him? "He hath *showed* thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee?" Does he, as thou wouldst insinuate, require such costly sacrifices at thy hand, that his service is hard and oppressive? "What does he require of thee, but to do justly," injuring no one by word or deed; "to love mercy," exercising compassion and benevolence towards all men; "and to walk humbly with thy God," as well as justly and benevolently towards men.

This sense of the whole passage is not necessary to the inference we mean to draw from it, but to us it appears the true sense. First, because it is expressly a controversy between God and his people; which seems to require that their reply should be a plea for their own conduct, in renouncing his service; and that the answer of the prophet, on God's behalf, should be a refutation of their plea. Secondly, God requires them to testify against him; and the words which we suppose to be the impious answer of the people immediately follow; and if thus understood, do testify against him, but, as commonly understood, they neither testify against him nor themselves. Thirdly, the latter part of the inquiry, "Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions," &c. is a very improper one for a pious Israelite; it might well enough have suited a deluded worshipper of Molock. Lastly, the reply of the prophet is a mode of address never used in all the scriptures but in reply to something evil and erroneous, and naturally conveys the idea of disapprobation. It is very probable, however, that attachment to the popular sense of this passage will prevent some from admitting this interpreta-

tion. Let it be so; yet will not the doctrine of justification by faith be at all affected by it, the words in question being evidently designed as a summary of all those duties which God required of the Israelites, in opposition to the imagination, that costly sacrifices would please him instead of obedience; or, rather, in opposition to the insinuation, that he was not to be pleased with any thing. But we find not one word of any specific condition of the forgiveness of sins, no more than in any other general or particular statement of the duties which God requireth from us. For it is not here said or meant, "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee," as the term of thy justification? But rather, what doth he require of thee, as the course of duty in which thou oughtest to walk? Not costly sacrifices, not hard and almost impossible services; but justice, mercy, and an humble walking with God.

Again; "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."*

Here the forgiving of others is made an express condition of being forgiven of God; and not a word is said about faith. But if we take these words in an unqualified sense, they will not only destroy the necessity of faith, and even of repentance, but of all moral duties, this one excepted. It would follow, that if a man happen to be of a forgiving temper, he shall be forgiven, although, in all other respects, a wicked man, an impenitent unbeliever. But these, we all know, are notoriously false principles; and therefore the sense of the words must be qualified. The meaning is plainly this: If ye, who seek forgiveness from God, forgive others what they have

* Matt. vi. 14.

done or said against you, God will forgive you. But that seeking forgiveness by faith is supposed, might be proved most largely from other parts of the word of God; and that the forgiving of others will never suffice, where such faith is wanting. For, as Dr. WHITBY remarks on the passage, though negative precepts are absolute, and he that forgives not shall never be forgiven, yet affirmative promises admit this limitation, if no other condition of salvation is wanting.

Again; "In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted."*

We shall make only two remarks on this passage. First, that they specify no particular condition of entering into a state of acceptance by justification; but describe the religious character of such as are now accepted: they fear God and work righteousness, as Cornelius and his pious neighbours did. But, secondly, if by acceptance we understand (what is undoubtedly meant) God's approbation of such characters, we not only allow, but insist, that their fearing of God, and their working of righteousness, proceeding from faith, is the perpetual condition of such acceptance. For although it is a glorious truth, that a sinner in one moment enters into a state of favour with God by faith only, yet it is as true, that a believer is every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to the whole of his inward tempers and his outward deportment.

These two remarks sufficiently rescue the passage from the hands of those who would use it against the doctrine of faith being imputed for righteousness; but there arises a question which it may be

* Acts x. 35.

thought necessary to notice. If in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted, how do such characters enter into a state of acceptance, where the light of the gospel shines not? Can they be justified by faith, who have no knowledge of the object of faith?

We may reply, first, that although these have not the *scriptures* to teach them, yet they have the visible creation, which is sufficient to make known to them the invisible things of Jehovah, even his eternal power and godhead.* They possess also the light of reason; and, we doubt not, some traditional, though very confused knowledge, of the original revelations of God to mankind: their sacrifices are almost demonstrations of this point. The dispensations of Providence also are sources of light to them: for God has at no time "left himself without witness among them, seeing he gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their heart with food and gladness." Yet farther, "these having not a" written "law, are a law unto themselves;" which shows the work of the law written on their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the meanwhile, accusing or else excusing one another. And we would ask, Who writes this work of the law on their hearts? Who gives them the light respecting it which they possess, and which to such a degree regulates and influences their moral sense? It is God; it is "that light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world."

Such of mankind as are thus circumstanced, are not, therefore, destitute of an object of faith, nor of those means which are sufficient to conduct

* Rom. i. 19, 20.

them to that object. And why may we not suppose, that, devoutly believing in God, according to the dispensation they are under, they enter, by such believing, into the favour of that God; and that, conducting themselves afterward agreeably to the work of the law which is written on their hearts, they continue to be graciously accepted of him? They never heard of Jesus, yet are they saved through the same merciful economy as those who have heard.

We reply, secondly, that such persons *do virtually* believe in Christ, they believe all that is revealed to them; and on the same principle would actually believe in Christ were he revealed. They already act agreeably to the low advantages of their dispensation; and were they introduced into the superior advantages of Christianity, we have every reason to suppose they would be equally faithful in the improvement of them; their faith in God, under the beams of the gospel, would ripen into faith in the Son of God, and into a cordial reception of all the promises which in him are, yea and amen.

We allow that we now proceed partly on speculative ground; but if our speculations are probable, no more can be expected on a subject of this nature. To say the least of them, they have a more pleasing aspect than the horrible supposition, that whole nations are consigned to inevitable perdition merely because they are destitute of our superior privileges. A supposition this, at which Christian charity must recoil; a supposition which, as it is frightful in itself, is also contrary to numerous express intimations of the Bible, and wholly opposed to the unbounded compassion diffused all over the sacred page.

Let us pass from the words of St. Peter, to those of St. Paul: "Not the hearers of the law are justified before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."*

What is implied in being a doer of the law? And what is the justification which is to be attained by this method? These two inquiries will at once conduct us to the meaning of the words, and to two important points of the Christian system.

To be a doer of the law most certainly implies faith; we will not say Christian faith, nor even so much as Jewish; for the apostle here supposes persons who never received the Mosaic law to be doers of it. But faith there must be, according to the dispensation a man is under; "for without faith it is impossible to please God;" for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. He, therefore, who believes in God, according to the manifestations God hath given of himself, under different dispensations, bringing forth the fruit of faith, shall be justified in the sense here intended:—as the gentiles, under the dispensation of his works and providence; the patriarchs, under the dispensation of the promises; the Israelites, under Moses and the prophets; the disciples of John, under his ministry; and Christians, under the dispensation of the gospel. But, secondly, what is that justification which is to be attained by such obedience? It is manifest, from the connexion of the words, that it is not the justification of which we are treating; it is not the remission of sins; but that final justification of all obedient believers, which shall take place in the day of judgment.

* Rom. ii. 13.

This is clear from the verse before, where the apostle expressly speaks of the last judgment; and is still more evident from the sixteenth verse, in which we find that this justification is that which will take place, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ."

Thus, as before remarked, these two inquiries have conducted us to the meaning of the words, and, at the same time, to two important Christian principles. First, that genuine obedience is the fruit of faith; and, secondly, that the final justification of believers, at the bar of God, will turn wholly on the evidence of their works of faith, their obedience to the law of God. Exactly to the same purpose are the words of our Lord, "By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." The verse preceding fixes the sense; "I say unto you, that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment."*

We shall conclude this section by an examination of the noted passages on justification by works, in the epistle of St. James. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?—Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, not by faith only."†

It will be readily allowed, that if the term justification here denotes remission of sins, the imputation of faith for righteousness cannot possibly be reconciled to these passages. But that it does not here denote remission of sins, admits of proof, and even of demonstration.

For, first, on the supposition that forgiveness of

* Matt. xii. 37.

† James ii. 21—24.

sins is here intended, the whole passage would be a flat contradiction to the numerous and express declarations of holy writ, which we shall have occasion to quote in a following section. Take one as an instance: "We conclude, therefore, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Surely we can never admit this conclusion of St. Paul, and these assertions of St. James, if the latter mean the same justification as the former. And this is only one out of very many scriptures, into a contradiction of which, the advocate for pure religion and undefiled, is forced by this way of explaining his words. But we cannot, we dare not, we need not admit, that an apostle of Christ opposes a doctrine which is expressly asserted by both Christ and his apostles; and we might confidently conclude from this, that he speaks not of the same justification.

But, secondly, this is demonstrable from the passage itself. For the apostle speaks of a justification of Abraham, which was nearly thirty years after his faith was imputed to him for righteousness. For this imputation took place before the birth of Isaac; and if St. Paul may be relied on, Rom. iv. 1, 2, 3, this imputation was his justification, and the words of Moses, Gen. xv. 6, a proof that he was then justified by faith, and not by works. But the justification spoken of by St. James was long after the birth of Isaac; the instance given is "the offering up of Isaac his son," which certainly was a considerable time after Abraham believed God's promise of the birth of that son, and is generally supposed to have been nearly thirty years after. So that the justification of Abraham by faith, when he believed God's promise of a son by Sarah, and his justification by works.

many years after, when he offered up that son on the altar, cannot possibly denote the same justification.

Thirdly, nothing can be more evident than the distinction between the justification by faith, without the deeds of the law, so strongly insisted on by St. Paul, and the justification by works, as well as faith, as strongly insisted on by St. James.

St. Paul's is the justification of the ungodly by faith; St. James's the justification of pious believers, who, like the aged patriarch, are bringing forth the precious fruits of faith.

St. Paul's is the justification of "the guilty, whose mouth is stopped before God," and who are condemned by his violated law; St. James's is the justification of those, who, like believing Abraham, are already justified by faith, already saved from wrath, already accepted in the beloved.

In a word, St. Paul speaks of a sinner's *attainment* of justification by faith; St. James of his *continuing* justified by faith and its fruit, *good works*.

To what, then, does the whole amount?—To two capital articles of Christian truth. First, that a sinner is justified by faith only; in the moment that he believes with his heart unto righteousness, God forgives him all his past offences, and admits him into his favour as though he never had offended: and this he does by a free act of grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus. Secondly, that his subsequent justification as a believer, his continuance in a state of justification, is not by faith only, but by works also: and this likewise by a continuance of the free exercise of the same grace towards him, through the same mediator.

Both these are doctrines of the highest importance, and we must no more disregard the one than the other. They are taught in the scriptures with equal clearness; and deprived of either, we should be utterly destitute of a key with which to unlock a considerable part of holy writ, respecting faith and works. On the contrary, those passages, which without these doctrines are sealed up, and must remain so, upon a judicious application of them, will easily open; the seals will be loosed, the sacred volume will unfold, and present to us, in their native beauty, these two capital articles of the religion of God. We shall see with admiring eyes, that faith imputed for righteousness through the atonement of Jesus, is the abundant spring whence flow all the streams of genuine piety; and that this precious spring, together with its equally precious streams, form the character of a Christian believer, and constitute the one united condition of his continued acceptance with God.

Other passages of the Old and New Testament might be easily produced, which at the first sight may seem to favour the doctrine of justification by works; but they all admit of a rational explication, without at all admitting such a doctrine; and, rightly explained, form essential parts of that one complete whole, which constitutes the perfect system of evangelical truth.

SECTION VIII.

Further confirmations of the doctrine of justification by faith, drawn from the sacred writings.

THESE writings present to us various sources of evidence, from which may be derived arguments in favour of the doctrine before us, possessing different degrees of strength, according to their remote or their near relation to it.

Let us begin with the argument which arises from the peculiar stress which the oracles of God perpetually lay on faith.

It is unnecessary to quote all the passages, in both the Old and New Testament, on this topic: indeed they are far too numerous to quote, unless we wished to make a volume of them. But who can read the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, without discovering that a stress is laid on faith, which is not laid on any thing else that concerns man as a candidate for salvation? Even that one passage, where the apostle, overflowing with the plenitude of his subject, compresses much into one or two sentences, sufficiently impresses us with this conviction, the moment we read it: "What shall I say more? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Sampson, and of Jephthæ, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets. Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed

valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens," &c.

Again; when a miracle is to be wrought, Jesus perpetually requires *faith* in order to it; when it is wrought, he ascribes it to faith, as though it had actually performed the miracle; when he refuses to work miracles, it is because of their unbelief; when faith is weak he upbraids, in cutting language, even his own disciples; and when it is strong, he expresses the highest approbation.

Abraham, because of his faith, is not only accepted of God, but is commended by divine oracles as an eminent example, and obtains the peculiar dignity of being styled the father of believers: an honour not conferred on Abel, although *he* believed, nor on Enoch, or Noah; it was reserved for him whose faith was so great that he staggered not at the promise through unbelief.

Further; when our Lord is asked by the Jews, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" He replies, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent:" as though the whole of the work which God required, were comprised in this one.

Lastly, when the followers of Christ are mentioned, they are generally characterized by the phrase, "them that believe;" a phrase so frequently used in speaking of them, that it would require some labour to prove, that all the other appellations which are given them, if put together, would amount to the same number. Yet we know that the followers of Christ are possessed of many graces besides faith; but even love itself has not the dignity of characterizing them. It is not said, all that LOVED, but, "all that BELIEVED were together, and had all things common:" not even,

all that were CHRISTIANS, but “the whole multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.”

And why is so great a stress laid on faith? It cannot be because of its intrinsic excellence being greater than that of all other Christian virtues; for love is undoubtedly very far superior to it. Why then is it thus perpetually brought forward, and dignified? Why has it honours paid to it, which are withheld from virtues intrinsically its superior? Why has it a stress laid upon it, in every part of scripture, which is not laid on any thing else, nor even on all other things united? It is evidently because faith is the grand instrument of salvation; and all those graces, which, in themselves, are very superior to it, are implanted and matured by its instrumentality; and all those works of piety which adorn the trees of righteousness, and which are lovely in the sight of God, are its precious fruit.

If then so great a stress is laid on faith, because of its being the grand instrument of salvation, we infer, that the great branch of salvation now under consideration, pardon of sin and all its benefits, becomes ours through the instrumentality of faith. We allow, this does not prove that faith is instrumental of salvation by the imputation of it for righteousness; this inference would be too strong for the premises. But the inference we draw, that faith is, in some way, the grand instrument of salvation, is clearly deducible from the two considerations, that a greater stress is laid on faith than on any thing else; and that this stress is laid upon it as the *instrument* by which salvation is attained, seeing it is inferior, in itself, to other Christian virtues.

A second argument, and which will possess greater strength, and a nearer relation to the point in hand, may be drawn from all those scriptures which make unbelief the one great cause of God's displeasure, a deprivation of divine favours, and a judicial rejection.

Let us attend to a few passages on each of these topics. And, first, those which make unbelief the one great cause of God's displeasure. The people of Israel hearkened to the men who brought an evil report of the land, and they believed not God. "And the Lord said unto Moses, how long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs I have showed among them? I will smite them with pestilence and disinherit them."*

Again; "Ye believed not the Lord your God, who went in the way before you," &c. "And the Lord heard the voice of your words and was wroth."†

Once more; "The Lord heard this, (namely, the unbelieving language of Israel,) and was wroth, so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation."

Secondly, attend to those passages which make unbelief the cause of the deprivation of divine favours. Passing over Moses' being deprived of entering Canaan; the unbelieving lord's being deprived of a participation of the unexpected supply of food, and even of his life also; the father of John, Zechariah's deprivation of speech; and the people's loss of the benefits of Christ's mighty

* Numb. xiv. 11, 12.

† Deut. i. 32—34.

works, let us direct our attention to effects of unbelief still more to be deplored.

It deprives its unhappy subject of all the benefit which is designed to flow through the precious medium of the gospel. For the gospel was preached to the Jews as well as to us, "but it did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

It deprives men of present salvation from sin. "If ye believe not," said Jesus to the Jews, "that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."†

It deprives men of future as well as present salvation. "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."‡ "And with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he, that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore labour to enter into that rest," which remaineth for the people of God, "lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."|| "The unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.§

More immediately to our purpose; unbelief deprives a sinner of pardon, that full acquittance from condemnation which is proposed by the gospel. "He that believeth is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten son of God."

* Heb. iv. 2. † John viii. 24.

|| Heb. iii. 17, 18, 19. iv. 11.

‡ John iii. 36.

§ Rev. xxi. 8.

Thirdly, unbelief is the one grand cause of a divine, judicial rejection. This is implied in many passages, and is plainly expressed in the whole of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh of the epistle to the Romans: where the reprobation, the judicial rejection of the Jews for unbelief, is awfully treated of at large. As an epitome of the whole, take the latter part, the summing up of the apostle's reasoning. In an admonitory way, he addresses gentile converts: "If some of the branches be broken off, and thou being a wild olive-tree, wert grafted in amongst them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree, boast not against the branches," &c. "Thou wilt say then, the branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of UNBELIEF they were broken off, and thou standest by FAITH. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee," &c.*

It is manifest, we think, from the above scriptures, and from all others of the same import, that unbelief is a cause of the displeasure of God, the deprivation of his greatest favours, and a divine, judicial rejection, in a sense that no other evil is. We infer that faith is a means of attaining the favour of God, his highest blessings to man, and a state of acceptance with him, in a sense that no other *good* is: and, that what evils soever are drawn upon men by unbelief, the contrary blessings are attainable by faith.

Our third confirmation of the doctrine of salvation by faith, shall be nothing more than an appeal to a few texts in which it is asserted.

* Rom. xi. 16—23.

“By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”* “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever BELIEVETH in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”† “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”‡

Our fourth confirmation shall be drawn from those passages which respect our adoption as children of God, and which uniformly ascribe it to faith. “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”|| “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.” But mark what kind of believing this is: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”§ Again, “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”¶

And what is our adoption as children of God, but God’s reception of us into his favour as a father, by which he entitles us to the inheritance of the saints in light? “For if sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.”** And is not this necessarily implied in justification, and one of its great benefits? All those scriptures, then, which prove our adoption to be through faith, prove our justification to be through faith also. But we need not reason by inference. For, in addition to the scriptures quoted in the first section, we have a great number equally express and decisive.

* Eph. ii. 8, 9.

† John iii. 16.

‡ Acts xvi. 31.

|| John i. 12.

§ 1 John v. 1—4.

¶ Gal. iii. 26.

** Rom. viii. 17.

“ Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him all that BELIEVE are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”* Again, “ To him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever BELIEVETH in him, shall receive remission of sins.”† Again, “ What shall we say then?” Respecting the reprobation of the Jews, through unbelief, and the election of the gentiles upon their believing? He answers; “ That the gentiles which followed not after righteousness,” or justification before God, “ have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”‡ Again, “ We knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified.”|| To the same purpose, that striking passage in the epistle to the Romans: “ We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested,

* Acts xiii. 38, 39.

† Acts x. 43.

‡ Rom. ix. 30, 31, 32.

|| Gal. ii. 16.

being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins which are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."*

There are methods, we allow, of weakening the force of the above scriptures, and of all others of the same kind. But these methods are so manifestly opposed to the plain meaning of the sacred text, and to the whole scope of the apostle's reasoning in his epistle to the Romans, that they neither need nor deserve a serious refutation. If we be either uninterested in a doctrine in point of actual experience, (say, for instance, the doctrine of justification by faith, through the blood of Christ,) or if our proud nature resist a doctrine so humiliating, God may speak, and men in every age may urge what God has said, but still we shall be foolishly wise in finding out methods of evading that which he plainly teaches us, or impiously bold, in a direct contradiction of it. But without controversy, it much better becomes criminals before

* Rom. iii. 19—28.

God, as we all are, most humbly and thankfully to bow down to the gracious method he has appointed for our pardon, than to indulge enmity against it; and so, either wholly to discard it, or by our forced and foolish interpretations, to explain it away. What if it is a humiliating doctrine? Do we not need humbling? And is it not very proper, that rebels against heaven should be humbled? Besides, it only humbles to exalt. What if we should not, as yet, be interested in this doctrine, by actual experience? We may be; but surely not if we reject it. It is they who feel themselves guilty before God, and who humbly accept of pardon as an act of unmerited grace, through the blood of the cross, that become experimentally certain, that this is God's method of saving lost man: these can adopt the language of true believers, as expressed by this apostle, because they happily realize it. "Therefore being JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, we have peace with God, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. By whom we have access by faith, into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."* Such are the happy effects of justification by faith; such is the happy language of those who are thus justified; and this language may be ours, and certainly shall, if we resist not the counsel of God against ourselves.

* Rom. v. 1—5.

SECTION IX.

Reasons why God was pleased to appoint faith, and not works, as the method of a sinner's justification.

REFLECTING on the guilt of man, as a transgressor of the holy laws of God, we shall easily discover, that our offended Maker possesses an indubitable right, to appoint what method he pleases for our restoration to his forfeited favour. And could no other reason be given for the method he has appointed, than his own sovereign pleasure, which we are assured is always wise and good, this alone would be perfectly sufficient to induce sinful man, with silent submission, most cordially to embrace it.

Such, however, is not the use he makes of his authority. In the dispensations of Providence, indeed, "He is a God that hideth himself; his way is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known." But in the whole economy of human redemption, there is a visible fitness, a reasonableness, an exact adaptation to human nature, and to all the circumstances of the human race. Such a reasonableness, such a fitness, such an exact adaptation is easily discoverable in the appointment of faith as the way to remission of sins, and, consequently, to acceptance with God.

This is a point of some magnitude; let us direct our attention to it with great seriousness. But all inquiries into the reasons of divine appointments

are rather venturous; let us, therefore, inquire with caution and humility.

And, first, we take it for granted that salvation by Christ, particularly by his death and intercession, is a doctrine of divine revelation: most of those who are rather opposed to the doctrine before stated, are yet unwilling to give up this. Inquire we then whether one reason for the appointment of faith instead of works, be not, that faith imputed for righteousness, is perfectly agreeable to the doctrine of salvation by Christ; which justification by works would not have been. For faith has an immediate respect to Christ as the one only and sufficient Saviour; but works have no such respect to him at all. Faith has respect to Christ in proportion as it advances to perfection; whereas works, in proportion as they advance to perfection, discard him, as being the less necessary. This, however, is not the case with works proceeding from that faith which perpetually imbibes from Jesus the Spirit of holiness; works then advance in perfection proportionately to the advances of faith; but this faith laying all her works at the feet of him that loved us, makes them trophies to his mighty, his assisting Spirit.

If, then, it was necessary that man should be saved by Jesus Christ, it was also necessary that faith, and not works, should be the method of our salvation by him; the former being perfectly congenial to this doctrine, and the latter being altogether as repugnant to it.

Secondly, the doctrine of justification by faith, secures our belief of the revelation of God in general, and of its most interesting doctrines in particular: while justification by works would destroy our belief of some of these doctrines, and would

not absolutely require our belief of any of them, considered as subjects of revelation. There is no necessary connexion between the practice of good works, and a belief in scripture doctrines, as revelations of God; it is possible, that the moral virtues may all have been exemplified in persons who have not thus believed. On the other hand, justification by faith is a doctrine which necessarily secures our belief, not only in the scriptures in general, but in all those essential principles of the gospel which are inseparable from it.

If, then, the divine Being wills that the revelation he has made be seriously believed by the creatures to whom he has made it, this forms another reason for the divine appointment under consideration.

Nor let this be deemed mere speculation; facts have too much substantiated it. When the doctrine of justification by works has prevailed, the importance, and the necessity of believing some of the principle doctrines of the gospel, have been proportionably diminished. Has not the loose notion, that it signifies little what a man believes; so that his actions are good, sprung up and flourished in this soil? Very plausible indeed, to those who understand something of the excellence of good actions, but nothing of the more heavenly excellence and power of faith. Very plausible; but is it not the mask of unbelief? Were it strictly examined, would it not amount to this, that if a man should not happen to believe in divine revelation at all, yet so little do religious opinions avail in the sight of God, and so much do good works avail, that, were he a good man, he might, notwithstanding his mistakes, be acceptable to the

Deity.—Such is the language we have actually heard.

But so far is the doctrine of faith from encouraging principles so loose, so dangerous, that it will not admit of them in the smallest degree. Considering faith as the only way to the divine favour, it stands as a strong barrier to the sacred writings in general, and to their most precious doctrines in particular, against the invasion of erroneous and pernicious principles, and of gross infidelity itself. A man may abound in good actions, and yet, in the mean time, become a sceptic. This is impossible with respect to him that lives by the faith of the Son of God; while he thus lives, he can no more become a sceptic, than a sceptic, while he continues such, can become a believer.

Thirdly, the simplicity of this method of salvation, may be considered as another reason for its appointment.

Should a poor ignorant sinner, just awakening from spiritual slumber, just emerging from the gulf of his own darkness, inquire, "What must I do to be saved? I see a violated law, which condemns me to perdition; I feel a load of guilt, which I fear will sink me lower than the grave; how shall I escape the damnation of hell?"—What answer could be given to such inquiries, on the supposition, that justification is by works? Works he has none at present, excepting dead works. And should he be directed to keep the commandments of God in future, and be informed, that on this condition God will pardon what is past, his difficulty is only increased: for, attempting to do good, he finds evil present with him, and daily discovers in himself an increasing want of con-

formity to the holy law of God. Should he then be taught, that God does not require perfect obedience, but will pass over his defects; his soul, pierced with a sense of danger, and filled with solicitation respecting his eternal destiny, inquires, "What *degree* of perfection in my obedience, will suffice for my acceptance with God? And what kind of defects, how many, and how great, will he pass over?" And here the self-accusing spirit is left; no further replies can be given to her inquiries. How confusing, how confounding to a sinner, already overwhelmed with confusion before God, to have a method of acceptance with his offended Creator proposed to him, so perplexing, so unsatisfactory. Nor would his confusion and uncertainty at all diminish, upon deeper research: it would increase daily, in proportion as the purity of God, the extent and spirituality of his law, and his own want of conformity to both, should appear to him in a clearer and stronger light.

How different is the answer of God to such inquiries! How much superior is the satisfaction which it yields to such a trembling inquirer!—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,—believe especially, that he shed his blood for the remission of thy sins, and thou shalt be saved. Here all is perfectly simple. No confusing, unsatisfactory, impossible terms are proposed; only one thing, and that one exactly adapted to a sinner. He feels himself lost; this answer presents to him one who came into the world to seek and to save him. He is condemned by the curse of God's holy law, which he has transgressed; this answer exhibits to him one who has redeemed him from the curse of the law, being made a curse for him. He is deeply conscious of his perilous condition, and knows

not which way to escape; this one simple direction immediately conducts him to Christ, and to salvation. Not ten commandments implying ten thousand duties; commandments already broken, and which, instead of affording him hopes of pardon, alarm his trembling soul with their terrible penalties. Here are not proposed commandments to be kept in future, in order to the pardon of what is past, which he, all depraved and helpless, feels he cannot keep; commandments to be kept, yet allowing certain defects, which no one can specify, or say how great, or how numerous; commandments to be observed to a certain degree of perfection, which is wholly undetermined by God, and utterly indeterminable by man. Ah! into what a labyrinth should we have been led by a way of acceptance with God so perplexing. Not such is the path divine mercy hath marked out. See the simplicity of it. Man is a sinner, undone and helpless; Christ is a Saviour more than sufficient for his salvation; God offers this Saviour to perishing man, and every one who cordially embraces him is saved.

Fourthly, God has appointed faith as the method of our attaining justification, because this only is capable of apprehending that atoning sacrifice, which alone is sufficient to yield satisfaction to an awakened conscience.

Can such a conscience derive satisfaction respecting the pardon of what is past, from present partial obedience? Far from it. The more a sinner, thus awakened to a sense of sin, attempts to derive comfort from this source, the more he is dissatisfied and distressed. So far from being a healing balm to his wounded spirit, it deepens and festers the wounds already made. Sees he any thing in

his obedience to console his troubled mind, to inspire his soul with confidence towards God, and to fill the dark region of his guilty spirit with sacred peace? Just the reverse. Even blind pagans themselves could not derive perfect satisfaction from both their reformatations, and their acts of penitence; they wanted a sacrifice. Sacrifices they offered; most costly sacrifices, and sometimes even men themselves; as though nature, or the traces of some original revelation had taught them, that in order to make a proper atonement, it was necessary that the nature which had sinned, should suffer for sin. After all, they never were satisfied with the efficacy of their sacrifices, unless some favourable occurrence in their affairs encouraged them to entertain this imagination: so insufficient were they in themselves as a ground of confidence.

The very sacrifices which bled on the altars of Israel, and which Jehovah himself had appointed, could not take away sins. They did, indeed, "sanctify to the purifying of the flesh;" they cleansed the people from ceremonial pollutions. But it is "the BLOOD OF CHRIST, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot unto God, that purges the conscience from dead works." This, this only, is the object to which a bruised spirit is to look; and it is only by looking with confidence to this object, that its deepest and most dangerous wounds are to receive the healing virtue for which they call. Sinner, look at thyself. Alas! nothing canst thou find there to satisfy the demands of thy conscience, or to calm it into heavenly peace; nothing but what increases its clamours, and augments its perturbation. Review what is past; and try if it will pour its healing virtues into thy broken heart. Ah! instead of

healing its wounds; instead of restoring medicine, it pours into thy soul the malignant poison of unnumbered transgressions. View what is present then; survey thy repentance, and mark attentively the strictness of thy obedience.—“ Repentance! alas, it is not half bitter enough for a sinner like me. Why do not my knees incessantly smite against each other? Why do not rivers of tears run down mine eyes? Why does not my heart break?—And as for my obedience, woe is me! I am daily adding to the number of my offences; every hour renders me more guilty in my own eyes, and in the eyes of God. Neither myself, nor any thing belonging to me, whether past or present, will bear to be looked upon, but with grief and tears.”—Turn thine eyes, then, turn thy weeping eyes to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world,—to him that was slain for thine offences, him that bore thy curse. Look, look! thou self-destroyed sinner, to that astonishing object which hangs upon the cross. See his tears, his blood, flowing out copiously from those eyes of love, that heart of mercy; and listen to that dying groan which pronounces life procured, and eternal salvation for a ruined world. Behold him lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have everlasting life. Just as the serpent-stung children of Israel, by looking to that brazen serpent, derived healing virtue into their expiring bodies; so thou, a sin-stung child of Adam, by looking to the bleeding Saviour, shalt derive healing virtue into thy perishing soul.

Here, here is the only object that can satisfy the demands of a conscience which is pierced with a conviction of the malignant evil of sin; and faith

is the only eye that can discover this precious, this life-giving object. No wonder, then, that God should make faith the condition of justification; a condition which merits nothing, but which apprehends the infinite merits of God's Anointed; and which, while it justifies, appropriates that efficacious blood which instantaneously cleanses the conscience from all its guilty stains, and brings along with it a satisfactory evidence that we are reconciled to God through the death of his Son.

What shall we say more? Shall we go on to unfold the reasons of this wise and merciful appointment? The subject is interesting, but it grows upon us. We shall merely state a few more reasons, and leave the amplification of them to the meditations of the pious reader.

Fifthly, faith leads the soul immediately to God in the character of a saviour, and necessarily introduces us into sacred communion with him; which mere good works would not have done.

Sixthly, faith is an inward principle, operating with sanctifying efficacy in the heart; which works would not have been.

Seventhly, faith is a grace which contains in itself the stamina of every pious disposition, every heavenly affection, every good word and work; which cannot be said of works, how good, how numerous soever they may be.

Eighthly, justification by faith humbles the heart of man, and utterly cuts off every source of self-applause; on the contrary, justification by works would have supposed man to merit acceptance, and so would have laid a foundation for boasting; "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory."

Lastly, this method does the highest honour to

God our Saviour; as it refers to him the whole glory of our salvation, evincing that we are not saved by our own merit, but through the mercy of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. The reverse would certainly have been the case, had justification been by works: "For to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." His justification is not, therefore, of debt; for no one can imagine, that an act of faith, performed in one moment, and performed too by the mighty aid of the Spirit of God, merits in the smallest degree the remission of all his past offences, acquittance from the curse of eternal perdition, restoration to divine favour, and a title to life eternal. His justification is not of debt; but merely of grace; free grace, quite undeserved, spontaneously flowing out towards him from the bosom of unmerited mercy, through the blood of the Lord Jesus.

To conclude this topic; we affirm not, that all the above suggestions are unquestionable reasons for this divine appointment. It is probable some of them may be deemed remote, and perhaps really are so. But if any of them, or the whole collectively, will reflect the smallest light on a subject so interesting, making it appear that the appointment in question is not founded in the arbitrary decree of divine sovereignty, but in reasons sufficiently strong to make divine wisdom and goodness shine forth in it, a great end will be answered. And such, we hope, will be the case in a high degree, with respect to some of the above considerations; and that the others, like smaller lights, will yet contribute a little to the same desirable end.

SECTION X.

Preliminary remarks to an investigation of the popular doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, or active obedience.

To wrest from any one a principle which he finds a source of consolation in this vale of tears, is a painful task to a mind imbued with Christian love. And if such a principle be not either grossly erroneous in itself, or opposed to others of importance, there would be some cruelty in robbing him of his innocent mistake. In this view, deists and atheists are the most cruel of men, supposing their horrible notions were true, namely, that there is neither divine revelation to guide our erring feet, nor even a divine Being in whom to repose our hope. They attempt to plunder mankind of truths which are their greatest, and, in some distressing circumstances, their only consolation; and, in return, they would gladly palm upon us principles, profane as they are false, and gloomy and wretched as they are profane.

But when comfort is derived from tenets not only erroneous in themselves, but incompatible with other important truths, duty demands our best attempts to dry up these false sources of pleasure, that we may induce the mistaken to imbibe more salutary consolations from the pure fountain of truth. Such a duty now devolves on us, with regard to the subject of our present inquiries.

The imputation of the active obedience of Christ, is a tenet from which, while many have drawn

most licentious pleasure, some pious Christians have derived considerable satisfaction. And could we not without it, exhibit to these a plenitude of sufficiency in the author of our salvation, equally as great, and much more scriptural, we should proceed with the utmost regret. Before we enter, then, on an examination, which, we think, will prove this principle to be unfounded in the word of God, and quite inimical to some of its most interesting truths, suggest we a few remarks, tending to tranquillize the minds of such as may feel some alarm, even at the mere proposal.

Does it appear to threaten to shake the foundation of your confidence, or to cut off the stream of your spiritual comfort? Fear not; we shall only turn the whole of your attention to that true source of consolation, to which it is already directed in a good degree: we shall only urge you, to rest wholly on that immoveable basis, on which you are already desirous to build your hopes of pardon, grace, and glory. We will not attempt to deprive you of a little rill of pleasure, flowing from mistaken notions, without opening a fountain, deep beyond the fathom of angelic minds, and wide beyond their amazing powers of comprehension: pure also as it is plenteous, having in it no mixture of error; and refreshing as it is pure. Far be it from us to remove one partial and unscriptural ground of confidence, unless we could discover to you another which must be acknowledged altogether complete and scriptural.

What think you, pious reader, of the immaculate sacrifice of the Lord Jesus? The blood of him, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God? Think you not this blood, this fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, an ample source of consolation? A fountain gush-

ing from him who was innocent as pure humanity; when first it came out of the hands of God; and holy as that inviolable divinity; which originally impressed on human nature his own image. Examine, with devout attention, all those life-giving portions of sacred writ, which exhibit him as the only meritorious foundation of your trust, and fountain of your salvation, and then say, whether they direct you to the pure actions of his life, or to the expiatory virtues of his precious death. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Here we have a specimen of the language of God on this grand subject; and here we see what it is, to which sinners are directed: the wounds, the bruises, the chastisements of Christ, the laying of our iniquities upon him.

Turn away your eyes, then, from every other object, and fix them on the atoning blood alone. Here you will find a fountain which yields the richest supplies, a foundation which affords the surest support.

Be not alarmed, therefore, at the following investigation, as though we were about to take away your Lord, and lay him you know not where. Rest assured, that while we feel ourselves obliged by truth, to reject, as an unscriptural opinion, the imputation of Christ's active obedience, yet we glory in ascribing to his passive obedience, the whole of our salvation. And although we have no hope of ever singing in heaven, to him whose meekness, temperance, justice, &c. were imputed

to us on earth, yet do we rejoice exceedingly in the hope of falling at his feet, singing in our noblest strains, "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and the Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Yea, we think nothing more desirable in heaven itself, than to be permitted to join with the multitude which no man can number, to celebrate the deserved, the eternal renown of "the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood." And while we entertain neither hope nor desire of appearing in the divine presence, invested with the spotless robe of our Lord's unsinning obedience, yet our *only* hope, and our *highest* desire is, that we shall be "presented before God without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing;" having "washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And so much are we affected with the obligations we are under to that precious blood, first shed for us, and then carried by our great High-priest into heaven itself, to sprinkle the mercy-seat of God in our behalf, that it would be no small gratification to quote at length, on this occasion, all those heart-reviving passages of the gospel, which exhibit Jesus to a ruined, ransomed world, as our once-suffering, but now ever-living Mediator.

Should we prove, then, that the imputation before us is unscriptural, we hope it will have no other effect than to lead us to derive *all* our consolation from the blood of the covenant, and in it to repose *all* our trust, as being alone sufficient to reconcile us to God, and to consecrate for us a new and living way into the holiest of all. Here we shall find a never-failing source of pure and holy comfort, which, like the smitten rock, will send

forth copious streams of salvation to refresh our thirsty souls, while journeying through the wilderness to everlasting rest. Here also our feet, once sinking through the gulph of darkness and depravity into the gulph of perdition, stand firmly, as on an eternal rock, without one single fear of being confounded, even when the strong foundations of the earth shall tremble and give way. And here we find the grand theme of ransomed spirits; a theme we also hope to make the burden of our song, both in time and through all eternity.

SECTION XI.

An examination of several passages of scripture, which have been supposed to teach the imputation of Christ's active obedience.

SEVERAL arguments in favour of this imputation have frequently been urged, which are not immediately founded upon any particular scripture; but which have been thought so to connect with other essential principles as to support this doctrine. But it is hoped that no one will think it necessary to enter into a refutation of them (which might easily be done) if it can be clearly proved, that there is not one text, of the Old or New Testament, from which the above imputation can be fairly inferred.

That the texts quoted in the first section, in which alone the imputation of righteousness is expressly mentioned, cannot be considered as proofs of the

imputation we reject, is too evident to be denied. May we not boldly affirm, that they overthrow it? And may we not as boldly affirm, that no other parts of scripture support it? Because we cannot impeach the sacred oracles of self-contradiction, which we should, did we assert that one thing is expressly affirmed to be imputed for righteousness in some parts of scripture, and quite another thing in other parts. It is, however, incumbent on us to examine those passages which are commonly alleged in favour of this opinion. And let us do it with candour; truth, the truth of God, and not our own favourite opinions, ought to be our object.

We may premise, that the phrase so frequently used in modern times, "the imputed righteousness of Christ," is not once used by the inspired writers. This we do not, however, consider as being, in itself, an argument that the doctrine denoted by it is unscriptural: a term or phrase by which we denominate a truth, may not be found in the sacred writings, and yet that truth, clothed in other language, may. But in the present case there is one circumstance, which makes the entire absence of this phrase a very strong indication that the doctrine denoted by it is unscriptural. It is this; that although the phrase, "imputed for righteousness," several times occurs, as we have before seen, expressly affirming that faith is thus imputed, yet is the imputation of "Christ's righteousness" not so much as mentioned any-where; and, in these passages, even his righteousness itself, to say nothing of its imputation, is not once brought into view. Were no such phraseology, respecting imputation, used at all, the case would be much less unfavourable to the imputation we reject. But that the phrase should be used, used repeatedly, always

affirming faith to be imputed for righteousness, and no mention be made of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, nor even of his righteousness itself, appears quite unaccountable, except on this principle, that the Holy Ghost intended not to teach us any such doctrine.

Proceed we now to the examination proposed.—We may begin with Psalm xxxii. 1, 2: “Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.

If the imputation of Christ's active obedience be inferred from these words, it must be under one of the following suppositions: first, that sin cannot be covered but by such an imputation; or, secondly, that the non-imputation of sin, necessarily supposes such an imputation. But neither of these suppositions admits of proof. For the covering of sin is an act of divine mercy, whereby sin is all forgiven, and so, figuratively speaking, covered from the eyes of God, who no longer looks upon it with displeasure against the sinner. Exactly agreeable to this mode of expressing forgiveness of sin, are several other expressions on the same subject: as, “the casting of sins behind his back, the casting of them as a stone into the depth of the sea, the remembering of them no more,” &c. To cover sin, is to forgive sin; and God can with perfect righteousness do this through the propitiation which he has set forth, without imputing a legal righteousness. Had it been affirmed, that sin is covered by the robe of Christ's unsiuining obedience, put upon us by divine imputation, who could have denied it? But no such thought is suggested; we are only informed, that sin is covered; how this is done must be collected from other

scriptures. A learned and ingenious writer, (JURIEU,) though a rigid Calvinist, has not the smallest doubt but the phrase simply denotes forgiveness of sin. Indeed, he takes it for granted, and supposes it to allude to a rite in the Mosaic economy, of covering the blood of every clean beast. He reasons strongly to prove, that such blood always possessed the virtues of a typical atonement, and remarks, that to cover the blood, was to cover the sin. If this opinion be just, it will appear, that the covering of sin was not effected by the robe of Christ's obedience being cast upon it, but by an act of mercy through the blood-shedding of Christ. And certain it is, this doctrine will find plenitude of evidence in the Bible, whether the other find any or none at all.

With respect to the latter supposition, we allow, that in scripture style, non-imputation of sin implies an imputation of righteousness. But what that is which God imputeth for righteousness, we must allow God himself to inform us; and he informs us it is faith. Had the latter supposition run thus, non-imputation of sin necessarily, according to other scriptures, implies the imputation of faith for righteousness, it would have stood proof against every attack that could have been made upon it. More especially, when it had fortified itself with the authority of the greatest of apostles, who quotes these very words as a proof of this identical doctrine. So far then are we from finding the imputation in question in this passage, that St. Paul himself assists us to find in it the imputation for which we plead.

Again; Isa. xlv. 24: "Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." A glorious profession indeed! Well worthy to be a

subject of sacred prophecy; and thrice happy he in whom it is accomplished! But surely no one will say, in the Lord have I the imputed righteousness of the Lord, and his imputed strength. Surely these modes of expression would either have no meaning at all, or a meaning which all the art of man can never attach to these words of the prophet.

The term righteousness here denotes justification, that righteousness of God which is by faith; and to have righteousness in the Lord, even in our Lord Jesus Christ, is nothing more nor less than to be justified through his blood. This sense is confirmed by the words which follow: "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." Should any one imagine that some stress may be laid on the preposition, (*in*,) let him recollect that the Hebrew (ב) signifies more things than one; and that the words might be rendered, with just as much literal accuracy, *by* the Lord, *on account of* the Lord, or *by means of* the Lord. But admitting that this particle should here mean nothing more than what appears in our translation, yet would it not follow, that believers have righteousness in Christ by the imputation of his obedience to them, but rather through his obedience unto death for them. This is what St. Paul teaches us, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

All that can be inferred, then, from these words, is this, believers have in Christ a meritorious ground of justification, and a plenteous source of spiritual strength; they are justified through his blood, and renewed by his grace; cleansed from the guilt of sin by his atoning death, and delivered from its dominion by his victorious Spirit. And what more

than this can we even desire the words to mean? Do they not, when thus explained, secure a glorious salvation to believers, and all the glory of that salvation to the Lord Jesus.

Again, Isa. lxi. 10: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness," &c.

Is it here said that a believer is covered with the robe of Christ's obedience imputed to him? Certainly not. But when we have been accustomed to hear a scripture phrase explained in one peculiar way, as often as we meet with such a phrase in the scriptures, we naturally attach our own prepossessioned meaning to it, and take it for granted that it can mean nothing else. This is a general evil; an evil which operates fatally with respect to the true sense of a great number of scripture passages, and which is one source of dangerous errors.

It is the opinion of some great and learned commentators, that the prophet here personates the Jewish church upon her restoration from Babylon; and that these garments of salvation, and this robe of righteousness, denote her pious, honourable, and happy condition, subsequent to that period.

But should a more popular sense be preferred, and the words supposed to be the triumphant language of every true believer, yet will it not follow, that the garments of salvation, and the robe of righteousness, denote the obedience of Christ put on them by imputation.

What if by the robe of righteousness, we understand the righteousness of faith? That robe with which God covereth guilty man, by imputing faith

to him for righteousness. Invested with this heaven-wrought garment, every believer stands as completely accepted through Christ, as though he were adorned with the immaculate vesture of unsullied innocence.

Or who could object to the soundness of the doctrine, should we understand the robe of righteousness to denote Christian holiness; that heavenly raiment with which God adorns and beautifies all his sons and daughters?

Perhaps neither of these, but that which we first stated, is the true sense of the prophet. But we cannot help thinking, that either of them is as well founded as the sense we reject. At least it must be allowed, that the sense rejected cannot pretend to any thing like a logical deduction from either the text or its connexion.

Again, Jer. xxiii. 6,—“ This is the name by which he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

It is, in our judgment, an excellence in our English Bibles, that these memorable words are printed in capital letters: they are worthy to stand on the sacred page in letters of gold. They form one of the most interesting titles of God our Saviour, and contain a grand article of his gospel.

But, mark, it is not here said, that the Lord's righteousness is ours; much less that it is ours by imputation. It is the Lord *himself* that is the righteousness of believers. And in what sense? Undoubtedly as the author of it. For in what sense soever the term righteousness be understood, the Lord is its author; more especially so, as the term is here intended to be understood, namely, to denote our free justification. Of this righteousness

he is the sole meritorious author, by the shedding of his precious blood.

It is true, this sense supposes a figure of speech to be used, which puts the cause for the effect. But this is a very common figure, allowed by all, and frequently used by the sacred writers. For when Christ is said to be our light, our life, our strength, our peace, our sanctification, our salvation, &c. the meaning evidently is, that he is the cause, either as the procurer or the dispenser of these several benefits. And just in the same sense, and with the same propriety of expression, he is here styled, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

But what figure in rhetoric, or what example in holy writ, will vindicate the sense which some attach to these words? For supposing imputation to be intended by the phrase, **OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**, (let it be attentively considered,) it would follow, that the Lord himself is imputed for righteousness to believers. And how the Lord is imputed for righteousness, will require a definition, which, perhaps, was never yet attempted.

Let us pass to the New Testament. And here, if the doctrine under consideration be of God, we may naturally expect some clear revelation respecting it.

The first passage we come to, which some think favourable to it, is Matt. iii. 15 :—"Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Now it is evident, that the righteousness here spoken of, is that of which the baptism of John was one branch. And can any one indulge the imagination, that it was necessary that our Lord should be baptized in Jordan, that his baptism might in after ages be imputed to his follow-

ers?—Justice demands, that we charge not the folly of this supposition on all who espouse this doctrine: many of them are too judicious to attempt to support their opinion by such a pillar of sand.

But perhaps even these may lay some stress on another passage in this gospel: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”—Matt. v. 17. Why, it is asked, did our Lord come to fulfil the law, but that his fulfilling of it, his perfect obedience to it, might be imputed to believers?

We reply, first, that there were several very strong reasons for the necessity of our Lord’s fulfilling the law, without supposing this to have been any reason at all for it.

For, first, it was necessary that he should perfectly fulfil the law for himself; for, had he not, considering him as man, he would have subjected himself to its charge and its penalties as a transgressor. Secondly, it was necessary that he should fulfil the law, that he might afford us an actual proof, that it is exactly suited to human nature, and not either contrary or superior to it, were it in a right moral state. Thirdly, it was necessary in order that the divine law might be exhibited to us in all its unspotted purity, its unwrinkled beauty, its unrivalled excellence. Never could it have shone with such heavenly lustre on two tables of stone, although inscribed with the finger of God, as it did in the immaculate life of the Lord Jesus. And though the words of the prophet belong to another subject, yet are they eminently true of him: “He magnified the law, and made it honourable.” Fourthly, this was absolutely necessary, in order to his becoming a perfect example to his followers: as

such perfection in his example would certainly have been wanting, had he left the smallest part of the divine law unaccomplished. Once more; this fulfilling of the law was most of all necessary, because purity, unsullied by sin, was a quality essential to his mediatorial character. How could he have been a suitable mediator between offending man and an offended God, had he himself been an offender? Exactly agreeable to this, is the reason for the necessity of his perfect obedience given by St. Paul: "Such an high-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." And of this purity the Levitical high-priest was typical, in his ritual separation, in his white vestments, in his frequent washings, and above all, in the plate of pure gold upon his forehead, bearing this grand inscription, (קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה,) HOLINESS TO THE LORD.

But while reasons in abundance may be produced for the necessity of our Saviour's complete fulfilling of the law, we conceive there is no necessity with regard to the passage in hand, for our producing one: for it is more than probable, that his obedience to the law is not here at all referred to.

It is well known, that there is a strong, and a beautiful antithesis in the passage formed by the use of the two words καταλῦσαι and πληρῶσαι, the one signifying, as it frequently does, to throw down a building, and the other, to perfect, complete, or finish. The whole system of revealed truth is a lovely fabric, a sacred temple. This fabric was in part erected by Moses and the prophets, but they did not finish, they did not perfect, they did not complete it: this was a work reserved for the great master-builder, the Son of God. "Think not," says he, "that I am come to destroy the law and

the prophets," imagine not that I came to throw down that sacred temple of divine truth, which Moses and the prophets have already so far erected; "I came not to destroy," to dissolve, loosen, and throw down; "but to fulfil," to finish, to perfect, to complete it. And how was he to finish that fabric of truth, which they had left unfinished?—to perfect, to complete that which they had left imperfect and incomplete? Doubtless, by a full explication of what the law and the prophets had taught with some obscurity; and by making farther additions of divine truth, which they, in their inferior dispensation, had never been able to make. He gave a full explication of the law, by freeing it from the errors of the Jews, and by exhibiting the divine precepts in all their purity, spirituality, and extent: and this he immediately proceeds to do, after uttering these words, which sufficiently evinces that this was what he meant by them. It is true, indeed, that he exemplified the pure precepts of the law in his holy life; and it is as true, that he illustrated its dark types, and accomplished the obscure predictions of the prophets, in his incarnation, person, actions, sufferings, and offices. But although these things are true, and it would be no great force upon the words to suppose them all to be intended, yet is it, perhaps, more exactly, more precisely true, that the perfecting or finishing of the temple of truth, begun by Moses and the prophets, as first stated, is alone intended. This, however, is certain enough, that the fulfilling of the law by obedience to its precepts, cannot be principally meant; for this would either destroy the antithesis in the text, or, by preserving it, would make a sense almost ridiculous. Between, destroying or throwing down, and fulfilling, or per-

fecting and finishing, there is a manifest contrast, and a striking one, as just explained. But between destroying and obeying, there is no contrast at all, unless by destroying is meant transgressing; and then the sense would be uncommonly weak. How would it sound? "Think not that I am come to transgress the law and the prophets; I am not come to transgress, but to obey." Did the disciples of Jesus need to be informed with such emphasis and solemnity, that their Lord and Master came not into the world for the purpose of violating the holy laws of God? Were they in any danger of imagining that this was his errand?

But if, after all, any one wish to include obedience to the law in this passage, let him do so: but let him not infer the imputation of that obedience to believers; this is an inference it never can bear.

Neither will, 1 Cor. i. 30: "For of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

It is here affirmed that Christ is made of God righteousness to believers; but, certainly, not that his righteousness or obedience is made theirs by imputation. Christ himself is their righteousness, exactly agreeable to the prediction, "His name shall be called THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS;" and what we said on these words of the prophet is exactly applicable to these of the apostle.

In addition, we may ask, whether it would not sound very strange to affirm, that Christ is our imputed wisdom, our imputed righteousness, our imputed sanctification, and our imputed redemption? Would it not be much better to say, Christ is made of God unto believers, "wisdom," by illuminating them with his Spirit and his word; "righte-

ousness," by justifying them through his blood and intercession; "sanctification," by renewing them by his powerful grace and truth; and "redemption," by finally glorifying them in body and spirit?

The words of the same apostle in his epistle to the Philippians (iii. 9.) have also been thought to favour the imputation of Christ's active obedience to believers: "That I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

But in order to make this passage subservient to this imputation, it must be proved, that the righteousness which is of God by faith is the active obedience of Christ; and that our having this righteousness, is our having his active obedience imputed to us. On the proof of these two points, such an interpretation wholly depends; and we think neither of them admits of proof. On the contrary, a careful examination of the whole passage, and a comparison of it with others of a similar construction and import, will be found highly favourable to the imputation for which we plead.

Let it be remarked, first, that the apostle here contrasts the righteousness, which is of God, with his own righteousness, which was of the law. Now we cannot, in all the Bible, find a contrast drawn between justification by our own righteousness, and by the active righteousness of Christ. But such a contrast between justification by our own righteousness, and by the imputation of faith for righteousness, is very common in the scriptures; and in the four first chapters of the epistle to the Romans is drawn at full length. We infer, that the righteousness which is of God by faith, and which here

stands opposed to that which is of the law, is justification by faith imputed for righteousness.

Should this inference appear too strong for the premises, let it be remarked, secondly, that a comparison of Rom. iii. 21, 22, with the remaining part of the subject to the end of the fourth chapter, will demonstrate, that "justification by grace, (chap. iii. 24.) justification by faith" as opposed to works, (chap. iii. 25—28,) and "justification by the imputation of faith for righteousness," (chap. iv. 1, 2, &c.) mean exactly the same thing with "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ," (chap. iii. 22.) From which we infer, without any fear of successful contradiction, that the righteousness which is of God by faith, is nothing more or less but our free justification through Christ, by the act of God in imputing faith for righteousness: and that this is the righteousness of which the apostle desired to be found possessed, in opposition to his own legal righteousness. The passage is therefore a further confirmation of the important doctrine of justification by faith.

Again, Rom. x. 4: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

How Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, is not here affirmed; and therefore, to say it is by the imputation of his obedience to the law, can be no more than bare conjecture. And would it not be, at least, equally as rational a conjecture, should it be said, he is the end of the law for righteousness by suffering its curse? For we do read, that he has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; but never once, that we are saved from its penalties, by his obedience to its precepts.

The law here includes the whole of the Mosaic

system; righteousness is justification, and Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, (or rather, with respect to righteousness,) to every one that believeth.

Now if we understand, ΤΕΛΟΣ, *Telos*, to signify simply, *an end*, or *termination*, as it frequently does, the sense will be, Christ is the terminator of the whole Mosaic system, with respect to justification, to every one that believeth. And this sense agrees very well with the design of the apostles, which is to convince the Jews, that the law of Moses was not the method by which they were to be justified, but faith in Christ.

But if we understand, ΤΕΛΟΣ, *Telos*, to signify *the scope*, as the learned say it may be understood, then the sense will be this: Christ is the whole scope of the Mosaic economy; it had a direct reference to him; it terminated in him as its end, its grand object; and was designed to conduct Israel to him for justification. Exactly conformable to this sense, is that parallel passage in the epistle to the Galatians; "For before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law," the whole economy of Moses, "was our school-master to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."* †

* Gal. iii. 23, 24.

† The law, even the whole of the Mosaic administration, was a school-master or pedagogue to the Jews. The original word, παιδαγωγος, signifies a leader or conductor of children. The moral law convinced the Jews of sin, condemned them for it, and made them sensible of the impossibility of being justified by works: thus it taught them the absolute need of Christ. The ceremonial law pointed Christ to them, and served to lead

But whether we understand the words in the first or second sense, it will be manifest that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness by his atoning sacrifice, and not (by way of eminence) by his holy life. It was by his death that "he abolished the law of commandments contained in ordinances," that is, the Mosaic ritual; and so "blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances, taking it away; and nailing it to his cross." It was to Christ, our sacrifice and our priest, that the Mosaic law referred; and it was in these views chiefly, eminently, that he was its *whole scope*, with respect to justification. And is it observed sufficiently, that whatever be the way in which Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, it is only to every one that believeth; righteousness, justification through Christ, is here also wholly suspended on faith. This, indeed, is a principle which meets us wheresoever we turn; even those passages which are thought favourable either to the imputation of our own imperfect obedience for perfect, or of the perfect obedience of another instead of our own, frequently,

them directly to him for justification. From Moses to David, the Jews had the first rudiments of Christ, they were instructed to spell him out in the sacrifices and ceremonies, and darker promises of a temporal nature. From David until the Babylonian captivity, they were better taught the knowledge of the Messiah, in the explications of the types and figures of him, and in more clear promises of him by the prophets. And then, from the captivity to the coming of Christ in the flesh, they became more matured in the knowledge of him, and earnestly desired his advent. The law was their school-master to bring them to Christ, as their only relief and refuge: the end of the moral law was to drive men to him; the end of the ceremonial law was to point him out to them, and lead them to him, that they might be justified by faith in him. EDITOR.

upon examination, contribute to the scripture doctrine of imputation, as stated in the quotations of the first section.

But there is one passage on this subject, which undoubtedly has more claim to a serious investigation than any other; with this we shall, therefore, conclude this section. It is in the fifth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, from the twelfth to the nineteenth verse inclusive. In this passage, we are said to be "justified," and to be "made righteous," by "the righteousness," and by "the obedience" of Christ.

But supposing we should grant that the *active* righteousness of Christ is here meant, his obedience to the precepts of the divine law, yet should we not grant, that we are justified, and made righteous by the imputation of it. For we have before seen, that his perfect obedience is an essential qualification of his mediatorial character; and, as a qualification, it is concerned in our justification, without supposing it to be at all concerned in it by imputation to us.

But the fact is, that we cannot, with any reason or scripture on our side, understand the apostle to speak of Christ's active righteousness, his obedience to the precepts of the law. Our fall by Adam, and by our own offences, is here strongly contrasted with our restoration by Jesus Christ. Now we have only to ask, was our restoration effected by the pure moral actions of Christ, or by his expiatory sufferings and death? What number of scriptures can we produce, which explicitly ascribe our justification to his perfect conformity to the law? Not one. And why should we imagine this one scripture to teach us that which is taught by no other? Nay more, that which is contrary to a

multitude of others; which no more ascribe our justification to his holy life, than they do it to his wonderous birth; but, with one voice, proclaim, that we are accounted righteous through his precious blood. A minute investigation of every single text, which ascribes our justification to Christ, would demonstrate, that we have unbounded authority from the divine oracles, to understand the apostle to mean the *passive* righteousness of Christ; his obedience to the appointment of God, and to the awful demands of his violated law. And the same investigation would equally prove, that we have not the smallest authority from these oracles, to understand him in the sense rejected.

To confirm this interpretation, to prove that our Lord's passive obedience is here intended, let us direct our attention to two other passages in the writings of the same apostle, in which the same kind of phraseology is used, respecting our Lord's sufferings and death for our sins.

Read attentively, Heb. x. 5—11. Here we find, that Christ's doing of the will of God, which sacrifices and burnt offerings could not do, did not consist in his obedience to the law, but in the offering up of himself, as a sacrifice for our transgressions of the law.

Read, again, Phil. ii. 8, where our apostle teaches us, that the obedience of Christ, in which we are so deeply interested, is his "obedience unto death, even the death of the cross."

Indeed, our Lord himself taught the apostles this mode of expression, by speaking of his own last bitter sufferings as a doing of the will of God: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Should it still be thought strange that the sufferings and death of Christ, should be called a *doing* of the will of God, *obedience*, and *righteousness*, attend to two other considerations, which will cast some farther light on this peculiar mode of expression.

First, as the contrast here drawn, is between our fall by Adam, and our redemption by Christ, it was most proper that the terms of the contrast should be as strong as the subject would admit. Now as the terms *offence* and *disobedience* are used on the part of Adam, it was very proper that the terms *righteousness* and *obedience* should be used on the part of Christ. And this not without good reason; for as by Adam's disobedience to the law which God gave him, death came upon his posterity, so by Christ's obedience to the penal demands of the law, life is restored unto us. And as this mode of expression is evidently used in other scriptures, where no such contrast requires it, we can see no objection against the use of it, where such a contrast drawn out at length, with such exactness, does require it.

But, secondly, did not the peculiar nature of the subject in this passage require such a phraseology; could the contrast, in form, as well as in thought, have been preserved without it; yet would one single reflection be sufficient to vindicate it, according to the sense we put upon it. The grand business upon which God sent his Son, was to make atonement for the sins of the world; this was eminently the will of the Father which he had to do, the work which the Father gave him to perform. What, then, in strict propriety of speech, was the righteousness, the obedience of Christ? Doubtless it was his doing of that which was emi-

nently the will of the Father he should do, the great work he had given him to perform. His making atonement was eminently this will, this work of the Father; and therefore, this was in strict propriety of speech, his obedience, his righteousness. And we fear not to conclude, that this is the righteousness or obedience which St. Paul intends; it is this which stands opposed to the original offence, as its antidote; this which reverses our condition, constituting us evangelically righteous, and restoring to us a right to eternal life.

The above are the principal passages, which have been supposed to be favourable to the imputation of Christ's active obedience. But whether or not they establish this doctrine so clearly, so indubitably, that all the express assertions quoted in the first section must fall before it, and do it homage as a doctrine more clearly revealed, is what must be left to the calm decision of sincere inquirers. For our own part, might we be permitted to speak unreservedly, we should give it as our opinion, that the passages we have just examined, are by no means the original sources from which the doctrine in question was derived; the necessities of a system suggested the doctrine, and these passages were laid hold on to support it. That such should be the origin of doctrines called Christian, and the rule of interpreting some of the most important texts of the word of God, is lamentable enough; and ought to be guarded against by all who desire to know the doctrines of God.

SECTION XII.

An inquiry into the immediate dependance which our free justification has upon Christ.

THAT our justification has, in some sense, a dependance on the Lord Jesus, is what cannot be controverted, unless we reject the authority of the scriptures. But whether its dependance be on his teaching us how we may be justified, his giving us a law by obeying which we shall obtain divine favour; or whether it be on his immaculate life, his obedience to the law; or whether its dependance be on his death and intercession, or whether it be on any two of these joined together, or on all three, requires our serious attention.

It may, indeed, be allowed, that justification has a *remote* dependance on many things; almost every thing Christ is, or has done: on his pity which first moved him towards us, on his incarnation, his teaching, his obedience, on his ascension into heaven, his inauguration on the throne of God, and on the ministry of his gospel. But our inquiry is not now into the *remote* dependance which our justification has upon Christ, but into that which is *immediate*, that to which the scriptures expressly and uniformly ascribe this great benefit. Will not this inquiry be fatal to the two opposite schemes of justification, by the merit of our own imperfect works, and by the merit of the perfect works of Christ? Will it not demonstrate, that the scriptures know nothing of any meritorious

cause of justification, in whole or in part, but the blood and intercession of our great High-priest?

Let us attend to a few of those most precious passages, which ascribe our justification to Christ, that we may learn from God himself, what is the immediate dependance it has upon him.

Read, with most humble devotion, read the whole fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. See upon what the whole stress of our salvation is there laid; and how expressly we are taught, that our justification is immediately dependant on his "bearing our iniquities," and on his "making intercession for the transgressors."

Listen attentively to the words of Jesus, spoken a few hours before the power of his death convulsed all nature. He takes the emblematic cup, and says, "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins."* He directs not the attention of his disciples to his divine doctrines, nor to his unspotted obedience, but to his blood alone. And does not his great apostle just the same; "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood."† ‡ And, again,

* Matt. xxvi. 28.

† Rom. iii. 23, 24, 25.

‡ "All have sinned;" not some abandoned characters in the heathen world only, but all, both Jews and gentiles, whether learned or illiterate, rich or poor, all the world over. "And," by sinning, "have come short of the glory of God," ἔστρωσανται, have fallen short of the mark they were made to aim at.

"God hath set forth," proposed and exhibited, "Christ," in the promises, types, and prophecies of the Old Testament, and in the fulness of time actually sent him forth, "to be a propitiation." The word ἱλαστηριον, properly signifies the mercy-seat: the apostle alludes to the mercy-seat under the Jewish dispen-

“ Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”* Again, “ He hath made us accepted in the beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”† Once more, “ If the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”‡

Yes, the BLOOD is all in all: not a word is said about any other fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; it is neither a fountain of pure doctrine, by obeying which we are to be cleansed from sin; nor a fountain of perfect righteousness, but a fountain of BLOOD. It is the blood which purges our

sation, which was a signal type of Christ. The mercy-seat was in the holy of holies, placed between the shechina, the symbol of God's presence, and the ark wherein was the law; the one was above, and the other below the mercy-seat, which, as it were, covered the broken law from the eye of God. It was from above the mercy-seat that God showed himself propitious to his people, as being appeased by the great propitiatory sacrifice offered on the day of atonement, with the blood of which the mercy-seat was sprinkled once a year. Now in allusion to this, the apostle says, God set forth his Son to be the mercy-seat, i. e. to be a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of men; to satisfy divine justice by making atonement for sin. Sinners are justified freely by the grace of God, to the exclusion of all merit in them, through faith in Christ's blood. EDITOR.

* Rom. v. 7, 8, 9.

† Eph. i. 6, 7.

‡ Heb. ix. 13, 14

conscience from dead works; it is the blood in which we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; it is the blood in which we are to have faith; it is the blood which justifieth. Nor is there one single oracle of God that utters a single accent to weaken this prime doctrine: not one which makes our justification immediately dependant on any thing, even in Christ himself, but his blood, first shed for us on Calvary, and then presented before God on our behalf, in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. And here, instead of quoting almost innumerable passages, which exhibit Christ as if evidently crucified before our eyes, and which sweetly compel us to say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," we shall make and illustrate an important reflection: that the scriptures, not only lay the whole stress of our justification on the atoning blood, as the sole meritorious cause, but carefully turn our whole attention to it, whenever any thing else is mentioned, in which there may be danger of reposing that confidence, which ought to be reposed in it alone.

The Son of God assumed our nature; the divine eternal Word was made flesh; yet are we never said to be justified or saved by this; nor does the gospel permit us to rest our hopes upon it, as the ground of our acceptance with God. It conducts us at once from his mysterious birth, to the great design for which he was born—his atoning death. Are we informed, that he took part of our nature? The very same sentence immediately directs our attention to the design of this amazing stoop of divine majesty,—“That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who, through fear of death, were

all their life-time subject to bondage. Are we taught that it behoved him in all things to be made like unto us, whom he is therefore not ashamed to call his brethren? The design of this is at the same time expressed, not that we might repose our confidence in his becoming flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone, but “that he might be a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

And, as we are not allowed to trust for salvation, on his humiliating stoop from heaven to earth, so neither are we permitted to confide in his triumphant ascent from earth to heaven. Even the pomp of his entry into the heaven of heavens, amidst the acclaim of adoring angels, must not hide from our eyes the crucified Saviour. The same sentence which informs us, he has entered within the veil as our forerunner, affirms that he entered there for us, as our great High-priest: and the same breath that proclaims his entrance into the holiest of all, even into heaven itself, assures us, that it was by his own BLOOD that he entered in, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

The same reflections offer themselves respecting his regal inauguration. He sitteth on the throne of his dominion, in the character of a PRIEST over the house of God. It was after “he had by himself purged our sins,” that “he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high:” and it is “as a lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” that he now sitteth in the midst of the throne, worshipped by all the angels of God, and by the glorified purchase of his precious blood.

Nay, even the intercession of Christ itself appears to be proposed as the meritorious ground of confidence, only as it stands in connexion with his

atonement sacrifice, as being a perpetual offering of it up in our behalf. Just as the Levitical high-priest appeared in the symbolic presence of God, with the blood of bulls and of goats, in behalf of Israel, so our great High-priest has entered into the holiest of all, with his own blood, to appear in the actual presence of God for us.

But if neither his incarnation, nor his ascension, nor his regal exaltation, nor even his intercession, (but as a continued presenting of his blood,) is laid as the foundation, on which we are to rest our hope, with respect to justification, what shall we say of his perfect obedience? Let us hear what God says; and we shall soon learn, that this is no more allowed, as a ground of trust, than his birth, his ascension into heaven, or his regal inauguration. And, as though the Holy Ghost foresaw, that men would make it a part of the meritorious ground on which we are to stand accepted of God, whenever it is mentioned in a doctrinal view, our attention is immediately turned away from it, to his mediatorial character. Was he "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners?" It was because these were necessary qualities in a Mediator; it was because "such a High-priest became us." Was he "without spot or blemish?"—It was because such purity was essential to his "redeeming us with his precious blood." Does the same apostle assert his unsullied obedience? "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed to him that judgeth righteously." Yes, thus he delineates the perfect, the lovely character of our Jesus. But, as though he apprehended some danger of our confiding in it, instead of resting wholly on

his mediation, he finishes not the sentence without turning our attention to him, "who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, by whose stripes we are healed."

Would another apostle give us a perfect example of humility? He first elevates our thoughts to him, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; then he exhibits him stooping from the heights of his divine glory, making himself of no reputation, and appearing in the likeness of men, and in the form of a servant. Unequaled as the perfection of this humility is, we are not permitted to rest in the contemplation of it, but are immediately conducted to the death of the cross, which closes the passage.

The same circumstance is observable in the prophet Isaiah. He tells us of him, who, being oppressed and afflicted, opened not his mouth, but with lamb-like meekness bore every insult, and every injury. With a prophetic eye he beholds him free from violence, and from deceit. But, as if he feared the perfection of his character would attract that attention which ought to be wholly fixed on his atoning sacrifice, he instantly hastens away from it, and conducts us to him that was "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities," to him "by whose stripes we are healed," who "bears our griefs and carries our sorrows," to him "on whom our iniquities are laid," whom it "pleased the Lord to bruise," and whose "soul he made an offering for sin."

Thus we see, that the incarnation of our Lord, his triumphant ascent to heaven, his regal exaltation, his prevailing intercession, and his spotless obedience are all caused to turn towards his expiatory sacrifice, as to the common centre of every

excellence in his adorable character. Here meet all the rays of his unequalled glories, his unrivall'd merit. In this grand point they are all concentrated; and upon this point only are we allowed to fix our eyes, as being the sole object of faith, with regard to merit, exhibited to our view by the gospel of the blessed God.

SECTION XIII.

Remarks on the importance of propagating, in its purity, the doctrine of imputation, as taught in the scriptures.

BIGOTRY is hateful in the extreme; but zeal in the pursuit and propagation of truth is highly laudable. And we cannot help fearing, that some have been so rapid and incautious in their departure from what is called illiberality, as to rush into the opposite extreme; indifference with respect to religious truth. Let us hate the one; but God forbid we should fall a prey to the other. Bigotry is injurious to the cause of truth, because blindly furious in its attempts to promote it. Indifference is no less so, by relaxing the mind in her inquiries after it, and by destroying every spark of zeal for its propagation.

It is highly probable, that some who are not wholly sunk into a state of indifference, respecting the truth of God, may yet be so far under the influence of this evil, as to judge it a matter of little moment, whether the imputation of Christ's active obedience, or the imputation of faith for righteousness, be in-

sisted upon. This, however, must certainly be a great mistake, as every one, we think, will discover, who sufficiently enters into the following considerations.

First, if the reasoning in the preceding sections be just, the imputation of faith for righteousness is a doctrine clearly, expressly, and fully taught us by the Holy Ghost; while the other imputation is a mistaken notion, destitute of foundation in the sacred word. And can any one think it a circumstance of but little importance, whether we propagate the mistakes of men, or one of the most interesting truths of God?

Secondly, the imputation of the obedience of Christ, is utterly subversive of the imputation of faith for righteousness; they cannot both stand; one of them must inevitably fall. And is it of little moment, whether we publish the errors of men, which are subversive of the truths of God, or the truths of God, which will overthrow the errors of men.

Thirdly, the imputation of faith for righteousness, is the same thing with justification by faith. But the imputation of Christ's righteousness is directly opposed to this, and consequently tears up by the very roots that important doctrine. And is it of no importance, whether we zealously spread a doctrine, which will support and defend this grand article of the gospel, or one which tends to its destruction?

Fourthly, the imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ, is in itself, (what use soever some pious persons make of it,) inimical to the interests of personal holiness. For if this doctrine do not destroy the necessity of holiness, it certainly appears to weaken it; and may too easily be relied

on as a substitute for it. It requires, indeed, no small nicety of thought and expression, to make it appear probable, in the smallest degree, that both a legally perfect righteousness imputed, and an evangelically perfect righteousness possessed, are necessary to salvation. We never have seen, and, if we conjecture rightly, we never shall see the necessity of both demonstrated. And it is seriously to be feared, that, after all that can be said, the absolute necessity of personal holiness cannot be discovered, by persons in general, who imagine that God beholds them as being invested with the perfect obedience of his Son. On the other hand, salvation by faith, as we have before proved, is not only congenial to holiness, but conducive to it: we do not make void the law through faith; we rather establish the law. And can we think it of small importance, whether we propagate a doctrine which is destructive to the interests of holiness, or one which will most effectually promote them?

Fifthly, is not the tenet in question repugnant to the scripture doctrine of future rewards? For they who espouse this tenet, inform us that the obedience of Christ imputed to believers, constitutes their title to eternal life; and that eternal life is the reward of this obedience. Is this agreeable to the oracles of God? We read, that the Son of man will reward every one "according as his work shall be," that every man shall receive the things which he has done in the body, "according to that he has done," and that the dead shall be judged "according to their works." But where do we read, that believers will be finally rewarded according to the obedience of Christ imputed to them?

The doctrine of faith teaches us different things; that adoption into the family of God is that which

constitutes our title to heaven; "if children, then heirs:" and that the future reward will be proportioned to the extent of our obedience to the whole will of God.

And is it of little signification, whether we promote a doctrine which is utterly repugnant to the most important article of the Christian faith, (which we may pronounce the doctrine of future rewards to be,) or one which establishes and defends it?

Sixthly, although this principle is embraced by some who are able defenders of the doctrine of our Lord's atonement, yet we cannot, we dare not, conceal our fears, that it operates injuriously to it. For does it not suppose, that a part of the merit of Christ, with regard to salvation, is in his obedience? Does it not join his obedience and his blood, as forming the meritorious ground of our acceptance with God, and claim to eternal life? And is not this, at least, an indirect indication that his atonement alone is not sufficient? But indirect indications are not all; it has been expressly affirmed on this subject, that how sufficient soever the atonement of Christ is, for the remission of sins, nothing is sufficient to give us a title to life eternal, but his perfect obedience imputed to us. We will not say a word in refutation of these self-refuted assertions; we think, however, none can help discovering how injuriously they affect the meritorious sufficiency of our Lord's atonement. So likewise does the unscriptural phrase, "Faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ." This is joining together what God has put asunder: "faith in his blood," is the language of the Holy Ghost; but "faith in his obedience," and "faith in his righteousness," is the language of mistaken man, and a kind of language with which God never once di-

verts our attention from the grand object, the sacrifice of Christ.

And how does the doctrine in hand effect the justification of a sinner? Is it not by the imputation of Christ's obedience to him? And although the blood of the covenant is not wholly excluded, yet it has not all the glory ascribed to it; nor even the chief glory, as this subject is frequently expressed.

Now how evident it must be, to every unprejudiced mind, that, so far as this doctrine lays a stress on the active obedience of Christ, in the way just noticed, it must detract from the sufficiency and glory of his atonement. Justification by faith, on the contrary, allows no other meritorious cause of salvation whatsoever. And is it not one of the most serious of considerations to a Christian, whether a doctrine be inculcated which exalts and dignifies the sacrifice of Jesus, or one which lays upon it an injurious hand, sullies its glory, and detracts from its sufficiency?

Lastly, this doctrine of imputation, by its method of interpreting several striking passages of holy writ, turns away our attention from a crucified Saviour, to one whom it represents as holding out to us a robe of innocence. Whereas, the doctrine of faith so interprets such passages, as to set him forth as evidently crucified before our eyes.

Is iniquity said to be covered? The phrase leads us to that propitiation through which alone God covers, or (חסד) hides our transgressions from his holy eyes. But the imputation in question, turns away our attention from the atonement, and presents to us a robe of perfect obedience, with which our sins are to be covered.

Does the evangelical prophet bring forward a

Christian believer, in holy triumph, professing, "In Jehovah have I righteousness and strength?" The impressive language instantly directs our thoughts to the redemption that is in Jesus, to his precious blood, which is at once the foundation of our acceptance, and the fountain of our strength. But this imputation diverts our thoughts from this glorious reality, and directs us to another foundation, which, alas! is itself unfounded; to another fountain, which can yield no saving supplies:—a legal righteousness, which it supposes believers to have in Christ.

Does the weeping prophet, whose awful predictions generally drop from him like tears of blood, in one of his lucid moments, predict the glorious title of the great Deliverer; faith immediately views him as a Mediator, by which he becomes the author of our free justification, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." But the doctrine before us, prevents us from gazing on him, whose garments were all stained with hallowed blood, by presenting him to us as being covered all over in our behalf with the white robe of his obedience.

A celestial being informs holy Daniel, that everlasting righteousness shall be brought in by the great Messiah; and afterwards reveals to the prophet how he would do this, by exhibiting him as "cut off" for the sins of mankind. But the imputation we reject, will scarcely permit us to see this precious sacrifice, giving us to understand, that everlasting righteousness is brought in by his perfect obedience. The same observations might, with too much justice, be made respecting a great number of other scriptures. And is it of little or no importance which of these doctrines is propagated? Nothing but criminal indifference, respecting the truth of

God, can induce us to think so. The scripture doctrine of imputation is fraught with importance; and an indispensable obligation lies upon us to use every means, in order that we may understand it exactly as God has taught it, and, according to our best ability, propagate it in its native purity.

SECTION XIV.

Practical inferences drawn from some of the principal articles in the preceding sections.

It is esteemed no small excellence in the writings of St. Paul, that after discussing controversial subjects, he brings the whole to a practical conclusion. Let us imitate him; for practice is the only proper issue of truth; and all the knowledge we can attain, sacred or literary, derives its chief excellence from its applicability to practical purposes.

And, first, who can enter into the wise and most merciful economy of God, relative to the justification of his offending creatures, and not feel himself immensely indebted to him, and constrained to admire and adore him. Are we actually interested in this economy? Are we freely justified by faith through the blood of Christ? Then angels themselves have not so much cause to laud their Maker in heaven, as we have to adore and magnify the riches of his grace upon earth. And admitting we are not actual partakers of the benefit of this economy, yet are we not the less indebted to the mercy of God, which has appointed it for our sake: even the guilty, whose present rebellion against heaven

exposes them to perdition, have reason enough, guilty as they are, to fall at the feet of God, and, with sacred shame and confusion of face, to adore that boundless compassion, which has instituted a method by which they may obtain the remission of their sins.

Again, in what humiliating circumstances does the doctrine of faith prove mankind to be involved. Well might the apostle affirm, that it excludes boasting: for it exhibits man as a guilty being, condemned to everlasting death by his offended Maker; insufficient to perform any action, or number of actions, which will merit restoration to divine favour. In a word, the salvation of man is effected by him who suffered on Calvary as a public malefactor; and is to be actually received, by beholding that bleeding spectacle, with an entire confidence that life flows through his death. Let human vanity then, hide itself in the dust; and let deep humiliation bring us down to the feet of God our Saviour, acknowledging that all our salvation is of him. And what love is due to Jesus Christ? It is through his mediation alone, that God treateth sinners in the merciful manner stated in these pages. It is his atonement alone, that satisfies the demands of divine justice, vindicates the righteousness of God, and supports the throne of the divine government, in all its glory, undegraded by the salvation of a race of beings who have rebelled against heaven. It is this that demonstrates, that God is perfectly just in his moral government, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

And how important, how absolutely necessary is faith! It is not only a grace which includes every other grace, and is productive of every virtue, which forms the lovely character of a real

Christian, but is the one, only condition of justification. What can stamp upon it greater value? What can render its necessity more absolute and indispensable? Reader, art thou a partaker of it? If not, cry mightily to God, till he shed abroad his love in thy heart, through a believing application to him for pardon; till he enable thee to say, "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." It is thus, and only thus, that we can realize the doctrine of faith, and experimentally know its power and excellence.

Ye ministers of God,—with unwearied zeal publish this grand, this efficacious doctrine of the gospel. Are the seals of our ministry few? Let us examine, whether a defect in this branch of it be not a principal cause. The clear and zealous ministry of this prime doctrine, has always been, and still is, the power of God to salvation. Let us quit the mazy path of curious disquisition,—let us come down from the dangerous pinnacle of lofty, useless speculation,—let us turn away our feet from the fields of showy, but false eloquence, and let us proclaim aloud, in the language of God, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Let us direct our attention; and our labours, to perishing souls,—convince them, so far as means can effect their conviction, that they have violated God's most holy law,—that they are under its curse, and that the pit hath already opened its mouth to swallow them up. Then let us lead them to Jesus, announcing to them, with divine authority, the freeness of salvation through faith in his blood; assur-

ing them, by the declarations of the gospel, that in the moment they heartily receive Christ, as he is offered to them, God will receive them, pardon their iniquities, and fill their contrite hearts with peace and joy.

And let us take heed, that we speak such words as the Holy Ghost speaketh. "The imputed righteousness of Christ; having on the righteousness of Christ; justification through his obedience and blood; being covered with his righteousness; Christ's fulfilling of the law for us; and faith in his obedience," are all expressions which God never uses; no not once.

And why should we use phrases entirely of human invention, on subjects so important as this? Phrases which the wisdom of God never saw fit to adopt, amidst the almost endless variety with which the scriptures abound on this interesting topic. Why are we not satisfied with the language of God? Is it poor, is it trite, is it barren, is it feeble? No, we pronounce it incomparably rich, original, diversified, and energetic; appealing to the very soul, with a degree of power which evinces its divinity. Let us relinquish our dull, unmeaning, or else utterly erroneous phraseology. Let us learn from Moses and the prophets, from Jesus Christ and his apostles, the sacred language of the Deity. Language, which alone is exactly appropriate to its own grand subjects,—language all on fire with divine inspiration, and worthy of God its glorious author.

Thus zealously propagating the truth of God, clothed in the language with which he has richly furnished us, proclaiming salvation by grace, through faith, not in the words which man's wis-

dom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, the truth, as it is in Jesus, will prevail; glory will redound to God our Saviour, and remission of sins will be granted to multitudes of perishing sinners, who through grace will believe in his name.

THE MERCY-SEAT:

A SERMON.

It is presumed the following sermon will be acceptable to the serious Christian: and it will serve as a specimen of the Author's manner of treating religious subjects in the pulpit, and addressing his hearers on the momentous concerns of eternity.—The Editor had not seen this sermon when he inserted note page 176, which is now superfluous.

ROM. iii. 25, 26.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

THE peculiar doctrines of the gospel, have too frequently been exposed to the attacks of their enemies by an injudicious statement of them. This has furnished the adversaries of the gospel with some of their keenest and most formidable weapons against its most essential principles. The

grand doctrine of our Lord's atonement for sin has not suffered a little from this cause: it has frequently been represented in so injudicious a manner, that an enemy might too successfully enter the lists against it. Would to God the friends of gospel truths would more carefully attend to the scriptural representation of them. Had this been done with respect to this one doctrine, the chief ground upon which its opposers have raised objections against it, would have had no existence.

Our text may be considered as a complete account of this interesting subject: here the grand design of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, is expressed in the clearest and strongest terms. The apostle has been asserting our justification by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus, whom, adds he, "God hath set forth a propitiation," &c.

We shall not dwell on every phrase in this comprehensive passage; otherwise we might enlarge on these two, remission of sins which are past, through the forbearance of God. We might show that pardon of sin, is only of past sin, in opposition to that absurd and pernicious opinion, that it is the pardon of past, present, and to come. We might also prove that pardon is still an act of divine forbearance, notwithstanding the atonement which was not designed to lay God under an obligation to pardon sin, but to open a way for this exercise of his mercy consistently with his justice.

But, passing over these, we will hasten to consider the principal subject of the whole passage. In doing which, let us first take a view of the Lord Jesus as a propitiation, or propitiatory. Secondly, inquire into the methods by which God has set him forth as such. Thirdly, take into

consideration his grand design in thus setting him forth, namely, to declare his righteousness, &c. And lastly, show that although Christ is set forth a propitiation, yet man never derives pardon of sin from thence till he becomes a believer in Jesus.

I. And first, we are to take a view of the Lord Jesus as a propitiation or propitiatory.

1. The word in the Hebrew scriptures which is here rendered from the Greek *propitiatory*, signifies a *covering*; and in this sense it is applied to the covering or lid of the ark. To that covering of the ark, the apostle, no doubt, refers, in styling Christ a propitiatory. It was a striking type of Christ, and Christ is the exact antitype of it. Let us see in what respects.

2. The material of which the propitiatory was made, was typical of Christ: "Thou shalt make it," says God to Moses, "of pure gold." Gold is the purest of all metals, and this covering of the ark is the purest of gold. In this it denoted the spotless innocence and the immaculate purity of Christ. Gold is esteemed the most valuable of metals; and in this the propitiatory was emblematic of the infinite worth and excellence of Christ. Gold is the grandest and most splendid of metals; and this golden propitiatory was rendered still more grand by the two cherubims which stood at each end of it, majestically overshadowing it with their wings, and looking down upon it with profound adoration. And in this splendour and magnificence it was a lively representation of the dignity, the divine glory of Christ.

3. Again, the propitiatory served as a covering to the two tables of the divine law, which were deposited in the ark, denoting two things: first, the value and sanctity of the law, which must not

only be deposited in the sacred ark, but covered over with a lid of pure gold, whereby it was typically magnified, and made honourable; secondly, its being thus covered, teaches us, that notwithstanding its excellence and sanctity, it is hid and concealed from the eyes of God, considered as a rule of proceeding with guilty man.

How emblematic of our true propitiatory! Jesus has magnified the law and made it honourable, not typically, but actually, both by his doctrine, which displayed it in all its spirituality, its extent, and its purity; and by his whole life, which was a perfect exemplification and fulfilment of it. Jesus also is a covering to the divine law; he has spread over it the veil of his infinite merit, to hide it from the eyes of an offended God, that it might not be the rule of his proceeding with a guilty world, which has violated it, a new and gracious method being entered into, through his atoning sacrifice.

4. Farther, the propitiatory was the place from which God showed himself to be propitious to the Israelites. He appeared to them in glorious grace between the cherubims over the mercy-seat; and was the reason why the propitiatory was called the mercy-seat; God, if I may be allowed the expression, sat upon it, showing mercy to the people.

How striking a representation of the Redeemer! It is in *him*, our real mercy-seat, that God shows himself propitious to a guilty world; it was in *him* that God reconciled the world unto himself; it is through *Christ* that he proclaims his compassion to ruined man, and makes a free offer of pardon and salvation.

5. Once more; notwithstanding the propitiatory consisted of the most pure, the most valuable, and

most splendid of metals, yet would not God show himself propitious from it unless it were sprinkled plenteously with the blood of the great yearly atonement: So Jesus Christ, notwithstanding his unspotted purity, his infinite excellence and his divine glory, yet would not God show his mercy to guilty man through him, unless he were plenteously besprinkled with his own most precious blood. His purity, his excellence, his divine glory, will not avail; his blood must flow to open a way for the display of divine mercy. Such are the ideas that attach to the Lord Jesus as a propitiation.

II. Let us proceed, secondly, to inquire into the methods by which God has set him forth in this character.

1. God has set forth his Son a propitiation, by typical representations. Long before Christ actually suffered for sin, he was typified by the various rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses. The sin offering, the scape-goat, the paschal lamb, and even the high-priest himself, were typical of Christ, and by these he was set forth to the ancient Israelites as a propitiation for sin.

2. God hath set forth his Son a propitiation, by predictions or prophecies, which exhibited him, long before the event, as wounded for our transgression, and bruised for our iniquities; as "cut off, not for himself, but for the sins of the people."

3. God has set forth his Son a propitiation by the ministry of John the Baptist. In what character did he point out the Redeemer? Did he say, behold the king of Israel? See the great prophet like unto Moses?—These would have been genuine characteristics by which to have directed the people's attention to him. But he had to turn their eyes to him in a character still more important.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!” Thus announcing him as a propitiation for the sins of all the human race.

4. God has set forth his Son a propitiation, by the wondrous circumstances attendant on his death. The darkened sun, the rending rocks, the quaking earth, all seem to evince the displeasure of God against sin, and the atoning efficacy of his death, who was pouring out his blood to atone for it. And why must the veil of the temple be rent? but to denote that the office of the high-priest, who entered into it once a year, was now abolished, the true High-priest having now made a real atonement for the sins of the world.

5. God has set forth his Son a propitiation by his victorious resurrection, his triumphant ascension into heaven, and the coming of the Holy Ghost, each of which were demonstrations that the sacrifice was accepted, and man redeemed.

6. But more especially, God hath set forth his Son a propitiation by the preaching of the gospel, and by the writings of the evangelists and apostles. And it is still the grand business of those who preach the gospel, to exhibit, to set forth in the clearest manner, the same propitiatory; Christ crucified, expiating the sins of the whole world.

III. This leads us to the grand design of God in setting forth his Son in this character. The apostle expresses this design in the strongest manner: **“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation.”** He repeats it, **“To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past.”** And to render it still more expressive and full, he repeats it again, **“That he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”**

1. By the righteousness of God, we here under-

stand his justice as a moral governor. This righteousness must be declared, demonstrated, or made manifest in his government of man. It *might* have been displayed in our condemnation, and everlasting punishment for sin. But God is merciful as well as just, and therefore he did not chuse to display his righteousness in this manner: he chose rather to set forth his Son a propitiation, that his justice might be displayed in demanding satisfaction from him, and that his mercy might be exercised in our pardon and salvation. So that the sense may be thus expressed:—God hath set forth his Son a propitiation, to declare his righteousness, to demonstrate his justice in demanding from him satisfaction for sin, in order that all our sins might be forgiven consistently with his inviolable justice, and honourably to the credit of his moral government.

2. So then the atonement was not designed to produce any change in God, for he is unchangeable; and all those objections against this doctrine, which are raised on this supposition, are perfectly unfounded. And perhaps it is well to be careful, how we speak of the atonement as quenching the wrath of God, appeasing his anger, and the like. It is true, if by the wrath and the anger of God, is meant only the demands of his affronted justice, the atoning blood, it is certain, satisfied those demands, and, in this qualified sense, quenched his wrath, and appeased his anger. But as these are not phrases used in the scriptures, and as they are likely to convey wrong ideas, would it not be better to keep close to the grandeur of scripture style on this weighty subject. For *literally*, it was not a flame of wrath in God, that was to be quenched by the blood of Christ: it was an honourable perfection of his nature that was to be displayed and

vindicated,—I mean his justice. It was not, literally speaking, the anger of God against man that was to be appeased; it was a grand principle in his government of reasonable, but guilty creatures, that was to be demonstrated and supported, namely, the righteousness of it, which must have sunk for ever, if rebels had escaped due punishment, and had been crowned with eternal glory, without such an atonement. And whosoever will consider the spotless innocence, the unrivalled purity, and the infinite dignity of the atoning sacrifice, together with the nature and greatness of the suffering, by which he freely offered himself up, will discover that the righteousness of God is as completely displayed in the salvation of man, by this method, as if divine justice had satisfied its utmost demands in the punishment of the guilty offenders. At the same time, by this wonderful economy, divine mercy, which before lay hid in the bosom of God, is illustriously exhibited to the astonished view of all intelligent beings. God will not violate his own righteousness; yet he will not vindicate it by consigning a ruined race to eternal death. What then must be done? Why he demands satisfaction from one who was able to answer the demand, and who had undertaken our cause. The demand is answered; and he that answered it is set forth a propitiation to demonstrate the divine righteousness, that he might be just in himself and in his government, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

“Thou most indulgent, most tremendous power,
Still more tremendous for thy wondrous love!
That arms with awe more awful thy commands,
And foul transgression dips in seven-fold night!
How our hearts tremble at thy love immense—
In love immense, inviolably just!
Thou, rather than thy justice should be stained,
Didst stain the cross.”—

I can hardly forbear to proceed with the poet a little further. How exactly does he express the subject before us!

“ O’er guilt (how mountainous) with outstretched arms,
Stern justice, and soft smiling love embrace,
Supporting in full majesty thy throne,
When seemed its majesty to need support,
Or that, or man inevitably lost.”

Such are the grand, the august, the divine purposes of the atonement,—the honour of an offended God, and the salvation of offending man.

IV. I shall not enlarge on the last article, which was to show, that although Christ is set forth a propitiation, yet man never derives pardon of sin from thence, till he becomes a believer. This is clearly intimated in the first clause of the text, and more expressly in the last: “ Whom God hath set forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood.” This surely does not mean, that it is through our faith that God has set forth this propitiation, seeing it was set forth before we had either faith or even existence. But the meaning is, that he never becomes our propitiation, so as to justify us, till we have faith in his blood.

“ That he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” Observe, him that believeth; so it does not appear, that it would consist with the justice of God to pardon a sinner till he is a true believer. And, indeed, this doctrine is necessarily supposed by all those scriptures which insist on faith in order to justification, and this is what our apostle is proving to be the only condition of justification, through the blood of Christ. No man, therefore, is or can be justified, till he believes in Christ with his heart unto righteousness.

2. Let me then exhort, let me beseech, let me charge you not to rest short of a saving confidence,

a scriptural faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You attend public worship, and it rejoices our hearts to see you. Your outward conduct, we hope, is regular, and would to God this could be said of all men. Your religious opinions are probably just upon the whole. You have perhaps even joined yourself to a religious body of people; yea, and have good desires after God and piety. But suffer me to announce to you the utter insufficiency of all these to attain justification. You must renounce every other method of salvation, and seek it by faith in the blood of Jesus. Do not lose your labour, by going about to establish your own righteousness, but humbly submit yourselves to the righteousness of God. Fall down at his feet, confess your sins, and your helplessness, implore forgiveness, and expect to receive it through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus only.

3. O ye guilty, ye contrite souls; ye who are willing to be saved by grace through faith, "behold," even now "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" View, by humble faith, your divine propitiatory. View the purity, the excellence, the glory of his person, as denoted by the mercy-seat of pure gold. View him as magnifying that law which you have broken, and making it honourable; and then, as covering it with the veil of his merit, that it may not appear before God to plead against you. View him as your true mercy-seat, in whom God displays his infinite grace to a perishing world. View him as sprinkled all over with his own blood, plenteously bedewed with it for your salvation, and to engage your hearty confidence in him. Can you see him covered with his blood for your sake, and yet refuse to trust in him? Does not the sight melt your heart? Do you not read, inscribed in characters of blood,

infinite, astonishing love, in those bleeding temples, bleeding hands, bleeding feet, and in that bleeding side? Can you stand the sight? Can you gaze unmoved? ah! no; you must dissolve in gratitude, “He suffers this for me! for me! for me!”—Go then, go in peace; the Father looks with approbation on thee, because thou lookest with humble, grateful confidence on his Son.

4. Adore, ye happy few, adore the unsearchable riches of divine wisdom and love, displayed in the economy of human redemption. What wisdom, but infinite, could have devised a method by which divine justice could be honoured, and guilty rebels pardoned and glorified?

“What but the fathomless of thought divine
Could labour such expedient from despair,
And rescue both?”—

both guilty man and injured justice.

Both rescue, both exalt! O how are both exalted by the wonderous deed! and if it be a display of wisdom! O what a display of love! O what a sea of mercy is here laid open!—angels gaze, and are fired with adoring admiration. What then should be felt in the bosom of man!—man, who is the subject of all this mercy! man, whose salvation is the object of this amazing plan!—O what debtors are we, what debtors must we ever be to redeeming love. Let us make all the returns of love and obedience we can; still we shall be left to inquire “what shall I render to the Lord?”

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